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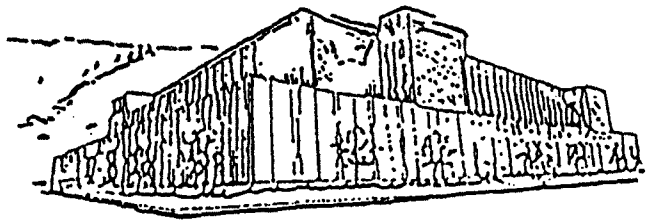
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THE EFFECTS OF WITNESSING PARENTAL VIOLENCE
ON ADULT COUPLES RELATIONSHIPS

by

Susan S. Rose

B. A., Vanderbilt University, 1994

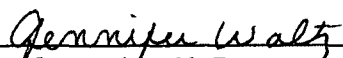
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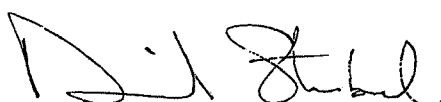
Master of Arts

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1998

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
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Author: Rose, Susan S., B. A., 1994

Title: The Effects of Witnessing Parental Violence on Adult Couples Relationships

Director: Jennifer Waltz, Ph.D. 

Past research has shown that individuals who witness parental violence experience negative psychological consequences, both short- and long-term. In children, witnessing violence is associated with conduct problems, depression, anxiety, and impaired social problem-solving. Long-term effects include being at greater risk for depression, anxiety, impaired social functioning, and experiencing violence in one's own intimate relationships. The current study was designed to extend such findings by exploring other long-term relational effects of witnessing parental violence. The following questions were addressed: 1) Do witnesses of parental violence have more dysfunctional beliefs about relationship disagreements than nonwitnesses? 2) Do witnesses engage in more dysfunctional conflict resolution behaviors (avoidance, insults, blaming) than nonwitnesses? and 3) Do witnesses feel less optimistic about relationship conflicts or about relationships in general than nonwitnesses?

Participants were 229 undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses. Each was administered a set of questionnaires assessing parental violence, dysfunctional relationship beliefs, conflict resolution behaviors, and relationship optimism. Measures assessing level of nonviolent parental conflict, parental divorce, and whether the participant was abused him or herself during childhood were also administered in order to control for these variables. T-tests revealed that witnesses and nonwitnesses did not differ significantly with respect to any of the beliefs or behaviors studied. However, several proposed control variables were significantly related to the dependent variables. Nonviolent parental discord was significantly positively related to the belief that disagreement is destructive, and to the use of avoidant and destructive conflict resolution behaviors. Physical abuse in childhood was significantly associated with later reported use of nonviolent aggressive conflict behaviors, and child sexual abuse was significantly associated with reported use of avoidant behaviors during relationship conflicts. Finally, parental divorce was significantly related to the belief that disagreement is destructive, with participants whose parents divorced reporting less of this belief. Thus, although many childhood risk factors seem to have clear long-term relational effects, further research is needed to explore the consequences of witnessing parental violence for later couples relationships.

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Introduction and Literature Review

The trauma of being a witness to ongoing parental violence in the home is thought to have many detrimental consequences for children. Trauma theories, attachment theory, social problem-solving theory, and social learning theory have all been applied to understanding the effects of witnessing violence between parents. Previous research has found that such violence is related to both concurrent and long-term psychological repercussions for children of violent couples, such as depression, anxiety, aggressiveness, and low self-esteem. An additional way that being a bystander of parental violence may have long-term effects is in adult intimate relationships. Specifically, witnessing violent conflict between one's parents may have far-reaching implications for how one thinks about and interacts with a significant other.

This paper will review literature on the effects of childhood exposure to conflict and violence, the effects of trauma, and research on social learning, attachment, and social problem-solving, in relation to the specific situation of being a witness to interparental violence. Evidence about possible short and long-term effects will be discussed. Finally, specific hypotheses will be put forth regarding possible long-term effects of witnessing parental violence in childhood. In particular, the present investigation will explore whether exposure to parental violence has an effect on beliefs about relationship conflict, conflict resolution strategies, and optimism about couples relationships in general.

Exposure to Interparental Conflict and Problems in Childhood

Many studies have documented the detrimental influence of parental violence on

children. However, because parental violence and nonviolent parental conflict frequently occur together (Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lambert, Martino, Anderson, & Sutton, 1991), it is useful to first examine literature describing the effects of parental conflict in general on the children who witness it. A large number of studies document the association between parental conflict and a wide variety of problems in children. Grych and Fincham (1990) reviewed work investigating this association and noted that studies have conceptualized and measured parental conflict in several different ways. Some studies have used indices of marital quality or measures of marital status as indicators of the level of conflict, while others have used child or parent reports of the actual level of conflict observed by children.

Studies using specific measures of overt marital conflict witnessed by children have by and large found a relation between interparental discord and child problems. Porter and O'Leary (1980) found using maternal reports of both overt marital discord and child problems that there were significant correlations between parental conflict and ratings of conduct problems, personality disorder, inadequacy-immaturity, and social delinquency in children. This association was found only in male children, however. Similarly, Emery and O'Leary (1982) found that children's perceptions of overt conflict between parents were significantly related to maternal reports of conduct problems, immaturity, and delinquency. Again, however, significant correlations were found for boys and not girls.

Interparental conflict has been associated not only with "externalizing" problems such as conduct and delinquency, but also with more "internalizing" problems. Peterson

and Zill (1986) found that parental conflict in intact families was associated with depression and withdrawal in children, and this association was found for both boys and girls. Wierson, Forehand, and McCombs (1988) investigated relationships between parental and adolescent ratings of marital conflict and teacher ratings of children's cognitive competence, prosocial competence, externalizing problems, and internalizing problems. They found that both parental report and adolescent ratings of marital conflict were negatively correlated with grade point average, cognitive functioning, and social functioning.

As evidenced above, studies using specific measures of overt conflict observed by children have found a strong association between experiencing parental conflict and a variety of problems in childhood. In addition, there is some evidence that parental conflict itself, aside from marital quality or marital status, is an important indicator of children's well-being. Rutter et al. (1974) found, for example, that childhood psychiatric problems were significantly more common in homes characterized by unhappy marriages that were overtly discordant, tense, and hostile, than by unhappy marriages marked by apathy and indifference between parents. Similarly, Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (as cited in Grych & Fincham, 1990) found that children's problems were associated only with the conflict actually observed by the children, and not with "encapsulated conflict," or conflict of which children were unaware.

Other studies have shown parental conflict to be a stronger indicator of childhood problems than the marital status of the parents. Long, Forehand, Fauber, and Brody (1987) investigated both parental marital status and parental conflict in relation to

adolescents' cognitive and social competence rated by both the adolescents and their teachers. Parental conflict, but not marital status, was associated significantly with teacher-rated variables of social and cognitive competence, as well as with grade point average. Further evidence that marital conflict, and not marital status, is associated with childhood problems is seen in that the above-mentioned findings of Wiersen, Forehand, and McCombs (1988) were true of children from both divorced and intact families.

To summarize the evidence presented thus far, it seems that overt parental conflict is associated with a wide range of childhood problems, including conduct problems, delinquency, depression/withdrawal, social and cognitive competence, and school performance. In addition, it has been found that overt conflict is specifically related to such problems, rather than simply the level of marital satisfaction between parents. Finally, evidence points to the fact that marital conflict witnessed by children is related to problematic behaviors regardless of the marital status of the parents. Conflict, per se, seems to be a better predictor of difficulties than separation or divorce. Given this information, it seems logical to assume that an intense level of parental conflict, interspousal violence, would have extremely maladaptive consequences for children.

Exposure to Interparental Violence and Problems in Childhood

Substantial research points to the probability that, as with witnessing parental conflict, witnessing parental aggression has detrimental consequences for children's behavior, emotional well-being, and cognitive processes. Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) stated that children of violent marriages are predisposed to behavioral and emotional problems in the four following ways: 1) they are exposed to violent and

violence-tolerant role models, 2) they are exposed to marital discord, 3) they must cope with the stress and fear of injury to the mother or to themselves, and 4) they may actually be victims themselves. In their study, children of abusive marriages were found to have more conduct and personality problems than children of nonviolent marriages, although the results failed to reach statistical significance.

Past research suggests that even infants exhibit negative effects after being exposed to parental violence. Perry (1997) argues that because critical developmental changes are taking place in the brain during the first two years of life, experiences during this time period have a particularly great impact on later behaviors. One fundamental process which takes place during this critical period is the development of the parts of the brain involved in attending to and reacting to threat cues in the environment. The organs most involved in these processes are located in the brainstem and midbrain, and are collectively termed the "stress-response apparatus" by Perry (p. 136).

Perry suggests that infants raised in violent environments by necessity develop a "stress-response apparatus" which is overactive and hypersensitive to threats in their surroundings. Although this mechanism is highly adaptive in the child's initial environment, it may not serve the individual well in other situations, such as in school or in forming peer relationships. According to Perry, a child who is overreactive and hypervigilant will have little attentional capacity to devote to learning activities in the classroom. In addition, this type of hypersensitivity to threat may impede the formation of close attachments because a person who is overreactive to nonverbal "threat" cues may be overly aggressive in his or her responses to others. Case reports of other detrimental

effects of witnessing violence in very young children have been published. Following the witness of severe incidents of violence between caregivers, infants have been found to show trauma symptoms such as anxiety, hyperactivity, play reenactments of violent events, night terrors, and bed wetting (Terr, 1988; Zeanah & Burk, 1984).

Other evidence suggests that there is a relationship between parental violence and negative relational effects in infants. Zeanah and Scheeringa (1997) found the results of a study (Zeanah et al., 1995) in which infant-mother attachment style was found to be related to mothers' reports of partner violence in the home, in that significantly more insecurely attached infants were reported to have been raised in violent homes.

Most controlled studies of the effects of parental violence have been performed with school-aged or older children. Reports of conduct problems among children from violent marriages have been offered. Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, and Zak (1986) compared a group of non-abused boy witnesses to parental violence and a group of boys abused by their parents to a community control group. It was found that both witnesses to and victims of abuse differed significantly from the control group on measures of social competence (activities, social participation, school performance) and behavioral problems (hyperactivity, aggression, withdrawal). In light of such findings, the authors suggested that witnessing parental aggression may be as strong a predictor of adjustment problems as directly experiencing abuse.

As with the witness of parental conflict in general, witnessing interparental violence may not only predispose children to "externalizing" problems such as aggression, hyperactivity and social incompetence, but may also lead to more

"internalizing" problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Pfouts, Schopler, and Henley (1982) obtained information on a sample of child witnesses of spousal abuse through case records and interviews. They found that a disproportionate number of these children were rated as socially inadequate, anxious, or depressed. Hughes (1988) investigated behavior problems as well as depression, anxiety, and self-esteem in abused and nonabused child witnesses to parental violence, using self-report measures from both mothers and children. He found the greatest degree of difference between abused child witnesses and control children on all measures, but nonetheless found significant differences between child witness and control children on anxiety and self-esteem measures.

Repeated exposure to interparental violence may also produce changes in cognitive processes in children. A study by O'Brien, Margolin, & Krueger (1991) investigated emotional and cognitive reactions of mothers and sons (ages 8 to 11) to tape-recorded family discussions varying in intensity of conflict. Mothers and sons were grouped as coming from physically aggressive (PA), verbally aggressive (VA), and low conflict (LC) marriages. The authors reported several findings of interest and offered various suggestions for interpretation of results.

First, sons of PA marriages responded with more self-distracting strategies to high conflict discussions than boys from VA and LC homes. Self-distracting strategies were described as off-target, tangential remarks that serve to distance the subject from the topic of discussion. The authors proposed that this finding could indicate an avoidance of conflict or lack of conflict-resolution skills among boys from violent households.

Second, this study found that sons from PA homes rated intensely conflictual discussions less negatively than did boys from VA and LC homes. This finding led the authors to suggest the troubling possibility that child witnesses of parental violence see physical aggression as more normative, which could conceivably lead to the use of high-intensity conflict strategies, including violence, in later life.

Third and finally, it was found that sons from LC homes made more positive predictions of outcomes to simulated conflicts than boys from PA and VA homes. In addition, they offered more democratic, problem-solving solutions to the taped discussions. The authors proposed that children from violent backgrounds may be less likely to view conflict as potentially constructive, and may possess fewer skills and resources for dealing with conflict in a constructive way. This study is particularly useful in that it is unique in providing information on cognitive as well as emotional and behavioral reactions to parental conflict.

As evidenced above, exposure to parental violence is thought to be damaging to children in a variety of ways. In addition, it should be noted that violent conflict between parents seems to be more detrimental to children than nonviolent conflict. For example, Hershorn and Rosenbaum (1985) compared children exposed to parental violence, children exposed to nonviolent parental discord, and children of satisfactorily married couples using mother's responses to a behavioral problems checklist. Groups of children exposed to nonviolent and violent marital discord differed from children of satisfactorily married couples on a scale reflecting conduct problems. According to the authors, informal analyses suggest that children of violent marriages were rated more highly on

items of this scale reflecting overt aggression, while children from nonviolent homes were rated more consistently as exhibiting more passive disobedience.

Jouriles, Murphy, and O'Leary (1989) investigated differences in behavior problems, conduct disorder, and inadequacy-immaturity among children of violent marriages and children of nonviolent marriages, controlling for general level of marital discord. It was found that parental violence contributed unique variance in predicting all types of problems assessed over and above that predicted by marital discord alone.

Further evidence that parental violence causes damage to children over and above that which would be expected from exposure to nonviolent parental conflict was provided in a series of studies by Cummings and his colleagues. In the first study (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981), boys and girls under two years of age were rated on distress reactions to naturally occurring and simulated expressions of anger between family members. It was found that distress responses were significantly more likely to occur during incidents in which one person hit another (usually a parent hitting a sibling) than during angry incidents in which no violence occurred.

In the second study (Cummings, Vogel, Cummings, and El-Sheikh, 1989), the authors showed videotapes of angry exchanges between adults to children ranging in age from four to nine, and subsequently interviewed them regarding their level of distress. The simulated exchanges were varied in intensity, with some involving nonverbal expressions of anger, some involving only verbal expressions, and some involving verbal and physical expressions of anger. Children reported the most distress in response to expressions of anger involving both verbal and physical aggression.

In the third study, it was found that children who had witnessed violence responded differently to viewing conflictual situations than children who had witnessed only nonviolent confrontations. Cummings, Pelligrini, Notarius, & Cummings (1989) exposed children to both amiable and angry exchanges between an experimenter and mothers in simulated sessions. Children were grouped according to history of interparental physical and verbal hostility. It was found that following exposure to angry exchanges, children from families with a history of physical aggression exhibited more distress and showed more comforting behaviors toward their mothers than children whose families had displayed only verbal aggression.

Finally, Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lambert, Martino, Anderson, and Sutton (1991) divided preschool-aged children into the four following groups to investigate differences in conduct and emotional problems: 1) children exposed to both physical and verbal conflict living at home, 2) children exposed to both physical and verbal conflict living in shelters, 3) children exposed to verbal conflict only living at home, and 4) a home control group. It was found that children who had experienced only verbal conflict had a moderate level of conduct problems, while children exposed to both verbal and physical conflict had clinical levels of conduct problems as well as moderate levels of emotional problems. In light of their findings, the authors suggested that there is a direct relationship between the nature of conflict experienced and the type and extent of adjustment problems in children.

In summary, many studies have found that viewing violence between parents has important effects on children's behaviors, emotions, and cognitive processes. In addition,

previous literature suggests that violent conflict, as opposed to nonviolent conflict, is especially damaging. In the next section, work investigating possible long-term implications of traumatic exposures, such as witnessing parental violence, will be reviewed.

Interparental Violence and Trauma: Possible Long-term Implications

Past researchers have included the witnessing of interspousal violence within a framework of traumatically stressful situations (Pynoos, Steinberg, & Wraith, 1995; Silvern & Kaersvang, 1989). Accordingly, the DSM-IV refers to post-traumatic stress as a cluster of symptoms present “following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving actual or threatened death or serious injury, or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person” (APA, 1994, p. 424). Certainly, watching serious physical injury occur between parents can be thought of as meeting such characteristics. According to Silvern and Kaersvang (1989, p. 423), “witnessing parental spousal abuse entails the fear, helplessness, and overstimulation that are the crux of trauma.”

Reactions to trauma include recurrent and intrusive reexperiencing of the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, and increased arousal, manifest as difficulty concentrating, outbursts of anger, hypervigilance, and/or exaggerated startle response (APA, 1994). Pynoos, Steinberg, and Wraith (1995) elaborated on these symptoms, taking into consideration that they often play out differently in children. According to these authors, reexperiencing in childhood may include traumatic play and behavioral reenactments of the event, as well as psychological

and physiological reactivity to reminders of the event. In addition, symptoms of avoidance may include a general numbing of responsiveness, which is consistent with the idea of a withdrawal from situations and feelings reminiscent of the trauma, and may represent attempts to regulate the intensity of traumatic emotions. Psychopathology among children exposed to trauma is thought to include post-traumatic stress disorder, phobic and anxious disorders, trauma-related disorders of attachment and conduct, depression, substance-abuse, and dissociation, (Pynoos, Steinberg, & Wraith, 1995) problems similar to those discussed in the previous section on children exposed to interparental violence.

In addition to the immediate effects of trauma discussed above, Pynoos, Steinberg, and Wraith (1995, p.86) suggested that trauma experienced in childhood may affect victims in potentially long-term ways. According to these authors, traumatic exposures in childhood may have far-reaching consequences for children in that "they occur during critical periods of personality formation when there are ongoing revisions of the inner model of the world, self, and other." Although no prospective longitudinal studies have been conducted to investigate the long-term repercussions of trauma, it has been associated with various problems in adulthood, such as self-injury (van der Kolk, Perry, & Herman, 1991), chronic neurochemical alterations (Perry, 1994), multiple personality disorder (Dell & Eisenhower, 1990), and borderline personality disorder (Herman, Perry, & van der Kolk, 1989).

Several studies to date have looked at the long-term psychological impact of the specific trauma of being witness to parental violence in childhood. Forsstrom-Cohen and

Rosenbaum (1985) divided college-age participants into a group that had witnessed interparental violence, a group that had witnessed nonviolent marital discord, and a group whose parents were satisfactorily married, excluding those individuals who themselves had been abused by parents. Measures of current anxiety, depression, and aggression were administered and compared across groups.

It was found that both men and women from violent homes were more anxious than those from homes where parents were satisfactorily married. The only differences found between those from violent homes and those from discordant homes were for women. Specifically, women from violent homes scored significantly higher on depression and aggression measures than women from either of the other two groups. The authors concluded that such results support the notion that witnessing violence between parents as a child has detrimental effects that, for some individuals, persist into adulthood. Furthermore, they concluded that men and women are differently affected by this experience.

Henning, Leitenberg, Coffey, Turner, and Bennett (1996) looked at general psychological distress and social adjustment in women who had witnessed interparental violence as children. It was found in a community sample of 617 women that those who had witnessed at least one act of physical aggression between parents reported more psychological distress and social maladjustment (less perceived social support, sense of attachment to others, and sense of social integration) than those who were not witnesses of parental aggression. These findings remained significant after individually covarying for the influence of witnessing nonphysical parental conflict, childhood physical abuse,

and perceived parental caring.

A similar study, carried out by Henning, Leitenberg, Coffey, Bennett, and Jankowski (1997), also looked at psychological adjustment and functioning of young adult men and women who had witnessed violence as children. Measures included a Global Severity Index, based on total number of symptoms reported on a symptom inventory and the intensity of distress, as well as self-reports of internalizing and externalizing problems. It was found that those who had witnessed violence as children scored significantly higher on all three dependent measures than those from nonviolent families. Furthermore, group differences remained even after comorbid variables such as parental divorce, socioeconomic status, physical abuse of the child, parental alcoholism, and nonviolent discord between parents were controlled for. In addition, men and women were affected similarly on all three measures. Again, support was obtained for the notion that witnessing parental violence is a traumatic experience, the effects of which can persist into adulthood in various ways.

Given that the purpose of the present study is not to investigate individual psychopathology *per se*, but to examine relational variables such as maladaptive relationship beliefs and behaviors in adulthood, it is useful to review theories of how childhood trauma may be related to long-term relational constructs. Terr (1995) used a medical metaphor to describe the fact that common experiences during childhood lead to widely divergent patterns in adulthood. She stated that "like childhood rheumatic fever, which causes a number of conditions in adulthood ranging from mitral stenosis to subacute bacterial endocarditis to massive heart failure, childhood psychic trauma leads

to a number of mental changes” (Terr, 1995, p. 302). Thus, violent exposures as a child may lead to obvious and severely maladaptive mental disturbances as mentioned above, or alternatively to more subtle changes in attitude and behavior.

Changes in thoughts, attitudes, and feelings about self, the world, and others may come about because the trauma causes major shifts in an individual’s “world view” (Everly, 1995, p. 37). Everly (1995) reported that this term was first used in German, “weltanschauung,” by William James in 1968 to refer to “an overarching assumption or philosophy about life” (p.37). Two important components of an individual’s “world view” are 1) safety and security, and 2) a sense of self.

Related to the concept of “world view” is Bowlby’s work on attachment theory and “representational models” (Bowlby, 1988, p. 29). Through ongoing relationships with benevolent, loving care givers, children are thought to form basic concepts about safety and security. Bowlby described attachment behavior as “any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world” (Bowlby, 1988, p. 27). As such attachments are formed, children develop “internal psychological organizations” including representational models of the self in relation to others. Threats to the loss of an attachment figure are thought to result in anger, anxiety, and sorrow.

Traumatic exposures, in addition to representing such a threat of loss, are thought to violate a child’s “world view,” or basic representational models that he or she has formed concerning self, the world, and others. Everly (1995, p. 41) stated that “psychic trauma serves to contradict or shatter the very foundations of what makes the world safe

and secure, and/or the very nature of how one perceives the self.” He added that such a blow may be particularly salient when the victimization involves someone known or close to the child, because in addition to feeling that the world is no longer safe, the child may come to the conclusion that “people cannot be trusted.”

In this way, it is logical to assume that traumatic experiences not only shatter an individual’s assumptions about the world, but also about the self in relation to important others. Furthermore, the type of traumatic experience may dictate the nature of specific changes in attitudes and thoughts about close relationships. Given that one’s experience includes witnessing violent conflict between parents, it might be expected that specific beliefs and behaviors surrounding conflictual interactions in a present close relationship would somehow be affected.

Other Long-term Implications: The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

Another way that witnessing parental violence may have long-term effects is by increasing the likelihood of being involved in an abusive relationship oneself later in life. The intergenerational transmission of relationship violence may be explained by at least four processes: 1) social learning/modeling, 2) deficient social problem-solving, 3) insecure attachment, and 4) diminished empathy.

Social Learning Theory. In general, social learning theory states that much learning of a social nature derives from modeling the behavior of others. “We observe others and from these observations, we form ideas of how new behaviors are performed. In turn, these coded observations serve as guides for further actions” (O’Leary, 1988, p. 33). Bandura (1977) was influential in developing much of what is now called social

learning theory.

Bandura's theory of social learning was different from previous operant and classical conditioning learning paradigms in that previous learning theories had suggested that learning takes place automatically, through the simple pairing of events (O'Leary, 1988). Contingencies and the pairing of events were considered the necessary and sufficient conditions for learning to occur. In contrast, Bandura added a cognitive component in describing social learning. The major assumption was that social learning takes place because it provides information to the individual, and that important cognitive processes mediate learning from environmental cues, or models.

Although Bandura agreed with the importance of differential reinforcement in the learning process, he proposed that the results of behavior do more than reward or punish the individual (O'Leary, 1988). Consequences to behavior were thought in addition to perform informational and motivational functions with respect to the individual. The informational aspect of behavioral consequences refers to the fact that people observe the effects of behavior and based on what they see form ideas about what types of behavior should be performed in a given situation. The motivational aspect of consequences deals with the fact that people observe the results of behavior and make decisions about what behaviors are likely to bring about desired rewards.

In addition to describing the various functions of behavioral consequences, Bandura (1977) proposed the existence of two different types of expectancies that result from observing the behavior of others. He defined "outcome expectancies" as predictions that specific actions will produce certain consequences in a given situation. In turn,

“efficacy expectations” were defined as “estimates of the probability that one will be able to carry out the particular action needed to produce those consequences” (Baucom, Epstein, Sayers, & Sher, 1989, p. 33). For example, based on observing others, one might conclude that getting a college degree will lead to a more highly desired job (outcome expectancy). However, if one watches a sibling fail out of school, one may not possess the confidence needed to complete the degree (efficacy expectation).

O’Leary (1988) described a social learning theory of spousal aggression. Within this framework, one component which is thought to influence the occurrence of marital aggression is the presence of parental violence in one’s family of origin. O’Leary proposed that physically aggressive parents serve as models for children with regard to aggressive behavior in general and spousal aggression in specific. Child witnesses often watch violence produce positive consequences for the abuser, in that the person being abused may try to placate the aggressor through submission, food, sex, or housework. Children, in this way, may learn that the use of violence leads to the acquisition of desired rewards in the marital relationship. According to social learning theory then, individuals who have witnessed parental violence should be especially likely to use violence in their own relationships as adults.

To date, much research has looked at the relationship between witnessing violence in childhood and using violence oneself in later relationships (see “Research Evidence for the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence” section below). In general, research shows that for male witnesses of parental violence, the relationship between witnessing violence and later perpetrating it is consistently positive. For women, the findings are

less clear. Some studies have shown that female witnesses of parental violence are also more likely to perpetrate violence in their own relationships than nonwitnesses, while some have not. Others have shown that female witnesses are more likely to become the victims of relationship violence than nonwitnesses. Thus, at this point, O'Leary's social learning theory of marital violence seems to apply more clearly for men than for women.

Deficits in Social Problem-Solving. Perry, Perry, and Boldizar (1990) described several ways in which deficient social cognition may be responsible for violent behavior. According to Dodge (1986), the process of making decisions about social behavior consists of five steps: 1) encoding social cues, 2) interpretation of cues, 3) response search (generating various possible responses), 4) response decision, and 5) enactment. Past research has suggested that aggressive individuals show cognitive deficits at each of these stages of social decision-making.

For example, in the interpretation phase, it has been found that aggressive individuals are more likely to perceive others' intentions as hostile than nonaggressive individuals, especially in situations in which the others' intentions are ambiguous (Dodge & Frame, 1982). In the decision phase, it has been found that aggressive individuals evaluate violent solutions as more favorable than nonaggressive individuals, in that they are more likely to believe that aggression will end another's noxious behavior (Perry, Perry, & Rasmussen, 1986), and also that they are more likely to attach importance to the results of aggression (control over the victim) than nonaggressive individuals (Boldizar, Perry, & Perry, 1989).

It seems likely that the development of these types of "aggression-prone"

processes is greatly influenced, at least in some cases, by violence in the family of origin. For instance, growing up in a home in which parents are violent with one another might make children more likely to believe that people do in fact have hostile intentions in a high number of situations. In addition, repeatedly watching one's parents resort to violence when conflict arises may lead to the belief that violence is the best way to end someone else's unwanted behavior.

Attachment Style. Another way in which parental violence may promote aggression in children is through the effect it has on the child's attachment to care givers. Ainsworth (1979) described ways in which various parental behaviors affect a child's attachment style. She suggested that infants are more likely to be securely attached when the caregiver is consistently affectionate and responds reliably to an infant's needs. In contrast, infants may develop an insecure attachment style when there is a history of inconsistent and insensitive care giving. Past research suggests that a secure attachment style is related to many positive qualities later in life, such as good social skills, empathy, and popularity among peers (Arend, Gove, & Sroufe, 1979; Sroufe, 1983; Waters, Wippman, & Sroufe, 1979). An insecure attachment style is related to many problematic behaviors, such as social isolation, restlessness, and disobedience (Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985; Lewis, Feining, McGuffog, & Jaskir, 1984; Sroufe, 1983).

These types of traits may in turn influence the likelihood of using aggression in interactions with others. According to Perry, Perry, & Boldizar (1990, p.139), "Research suggests that infants who enjoy trusting, mutually satisfying relationships with their care givers are more likely to develop prosocial, cooperative styles of interpersonal influence

that obviate the need for aggression." To the extent that parents who are overwhelmed by a violent marital relationship are unable to be consistent, sensitive, and reliable caregivers, insecure attachment in their children may be a vehicle for transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next.

Lack of empathy. A final way in which witnessing parental violence may increase the likelihood of using violence in a later relationship is through decreased empathy. Empathy can be conceptualized as "the cognitive ability to appraise the cognitive, emotional, or motivational state of other people" (Martin & Hoffman, 1990, p. 115). Children raised in violent environments may experience abnormalities in the development of empathy because signals of love and hostility are so often intermingled and confused. In other words, it may be difficult to learn to correctly evaluate another's emotional experience when expressions of love and closeness are intermittently contaminated with violent expressions of anger. The result may be a compromised ability to perceive and process signals of distress in others. Past research has uncovered an association between socially aggressive behavior and lack of empathy (Ellis, 1982). It may be that another vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of relationship violence is a lack of empathy fostered by being raised in a violent environment.

Research Evidence for the Intergenerational Transmission of Relationship Violence. Much research has documented the association between witnessing parental violence and subsequently being involved in an abusive relationship as an adult. Several studies using only men as participants have found such evidence. Howell and Pugliesi (1988) used data from a sample of 960 males to investigate a predictive model for male

spousal violence. It was found that age, occupational status, employment status, economic strain, and observation of parental violence all affected the likelihood that men would report aggressing against their wives. However, it was also found that witnessing parental violence had an independent effect on reporting violence, over and above that accounted for by the other variables investigated.

Further research on the factors contributing to male spousal violence was performed by Stith and Farley (1993). In this study, a predictive model of male violence was tested using a path analytic procedure, looking at the interplay between various factors such as sex-role egalitarianism, approval of marital violence, alcoholism, and witnessing parental violence in childhood. In a sample of 91 men, observation of parental violence had a direct effect on men's approval of marital violence, which in turn affected directly the likelihood of engaging in violence. Although the link between witnessing violence and becoming an abusive mate was found to be an indirect one, the authors concluded that the study did, in fact, lend support to the social learning theory model of spouse abuse.

Murphy, Meyer, and O'Leary (1993), using only men as participants, looked at the associations between family of origin violence, self-reported psychopathology, and current spousal violence. Participants were divided into the three following groups: 1) nonviolent men in discordant relationships, 2) nonviolent men in well-adjusted relationships, and 3) partner assaultive men. Compared to the two groups of nonviolent men, partner assaultive men were more likely to report child abuse and abuse toward their mother in the family of origin. The authors concluded that such results support the theory

that there are continuities in social development from childhood experiences to behavior in adulthood.

Studies that have used both men and women to examine the relationship between witnessing parental violence and being involved in an abusive relationship as an adult have by and large found an association between the two variables, with several notable exceptions. In a review of 52 studies on this relationship, Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) examined 97 potential risk markers of husband to wife violence and categorized them as consistent risk, inconsistent risk, consistent nonrisk, and risk markers with insufficient data. For women, the only consistent risk marker for being victimized by violence was the witness of violence in the wife's family of origin. For men, witnessing violence as a child was found to be a consistent risk marker for wife abuse, as were eight other variables, such as violence toward children, alcohol usage, income, assertiveness, and educational level. This study provided strong support for the social learning theory of spousal violence, both for men and women.

Another study of interest which looked at intergenerational patterns of spouse aggression was performed by Kalmuss (1984). In this study, 2,143 men and women were surveyed to investigate the relationship between observing violence as a child, being hit as a teenager by one's parents, and severe marital aggression in the next generation. Observing hitting between parents was found to be more strongly associated with marital aggression than was being hit as a teenager by one's parents. Furthermore, in this study, the results were not sex-specific. Men and women who had witnessed their fathers hitting their mothers were more likely to become victims as well as perpetrators of

marital violence than men and women who had been hit by their parents as teenagers.

Although the association between witnessing violence in childhood and being involved in a later abusive relationship seems to be a strong one, several studies have not corroborated these findings. Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) administered questionnaires concerning marital adjustment, alcohol use, and sex-role attitudes to 52 abused wives and 20 abusive husbands from a domestic violence assistance center. Personal history and demographic variables were also taken into account. Data were compared with that from 20 satisfactorily married couples and 20 dysfunctional, nonabusive couples. Three factors were found to discriminate between abusive husbands and nonabusive husbands with marital difficulties: 1) abusive husbands were less assertive with their wives, 2) they were more likely to have been abused as children, and 3) they were more likely to have witnessed parental violence in their family of origin. However, no variables were found which discriminated between abused women and women with marital difficulties.

Hotaling and Sugarman (1990) used data from 699 female survey respondents to identify risk markers which would best differentiate among women in nonviolent relationships, women in verbally abusive relationships, women involved in relationships exhibiting minor violence, and women in severely violent relationships. High levels of marital conflict and low socioeconomic status were found to be the primary predictors of wife assault. No evidence was found "that victims of wife assault are any more likely than other women to have witnessed violence between parents in their family of origin" (p. 9).

Finally, MacEwen and Barling (1988) performed a longitudinal investigation of

the hypothesis that violence in the family of origin predisposes individuals to react to stress through aggression. Two hundred seventy-five couples completed questionnaires regarding stress, marital aggression, and violence in the family of origin (both being the victim of violence and observing violence between parents) one month prior to their wedding, and at a one year follow-up. Although stress was found to predict marital aggression for women at one year, no effects for family of origin violence were found for either men or women.

Taken as a whole, the above evidence seems to support an association between witnessing parental violence and being involved in a later violent relationship. Although this finding seems to be more consistent for men than for women, evidence has nevertheless been uncovered to support the theories described above concerning the intergenerational transmission of relationship violence. It seems likely that witnessing parental aggression is a risk factor for being in an abusive relationship, however, it is also clear from these findings that many adults who witnessed parental abuse as children do not go on to repeat the pattern. Given this, it seems logical to wonder what other aspects of close relationships are influenced by witnessing parental aggression earlier in life.

Beliefs About Conflict

One aspect of couples' relationships that may be affected by witnessing interparental violence is the beliefs that partners hold about conflict. Recently, researchers have focused on the role of beliefs and expectations in relationships. For example, Bradbury and Fincham (1988) described relationship beliefs as an important part of the "context" of couples interactions. Context includes variables that are present

immediately before processing a partner behavior, such as thoughts and feelings specific to the situation, as well as general, longstanding variables such as beliefs and attitudes that partners bring into the marriage about how things should operate. According to the authors, "context refers broadly to the psychological conditions or variables that influence the processing of behaviors in marriage" (Bradbury & Fincham, 1988, p. 713). In other words, contextual variables play a part in determining how partners interpret and respond to events during an interaction. For example, someone who comes to the marriage with the belief "all relationship conflict is destructive" would likely become more upset when disagreements arise than someone who believes that "conflict is necessary for all relationships."

According to Ellis and Harper (1961), couples often enter marriage with irrational, unrealistic beliefs about how much effort and compromise will be involved in negotiating the relationship successfully. Such unrealistic beliefs are thought to be an important factor leading to marital dissatisfaction. Eidelson and Epstein (1982) expanded on such ideas, and further investigated unrealistic relationship beliefs held by couples. One factor they studied was the tendency for partners to endorse the idea that, in general, "disagreement is destructive." These authors stated that, although conflict in couples relationships is likely to stress a marriage, beliefs that any disagreement signals a lack of love or impending divorce may only add to the couple's difficulties. Indeed, they found a significant negative correlation between endorsement of "disagreement is destructive" beliefs and marital satisfaction.

More recent studies have corroborated this association (Jensen, Witcher, & Lane,

1987; Jones & Stanton, 1988; Moller & van Zyl, 1991). In addition, prospective longitudinal studies have found that increases in levels of dysfunctional beliefs are associated with increases in marital distress over a three year period (Kurdek, 1991), and furthermore are predictors of marital dissolution over a five year period (Kurdek, 1993).

It seems likely that those who have witnessed interparental abuse may hold certain beliefs about disagreement in relationships. Such individuals, based on what they have witnessed, might hold outcome expectations that all disagreement is destructive. According to their world view, all conflict may be associated with extreme pain, suffering, and danger. This view is likely to stress a relationship if it causes partners to see conflict as a sign that the relationship is "falling apart," rather than as an opportunity for mutual growth and understanding. Eventually, this stress may lead to relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Another aspect of couples relationships that may be affected by the witnessing of parental violence is conflict behavior. As mentioned above, previous studies dealing with social learning theory and relationship violence have suggested that those who view violence between parents are likely to become abusive adults because they have witnessed models gaining desired rewards in a relationship through using aggression. In other words, people form outcome expectancies that positive consequences result from the use of violence against one's partner.

However, those who have witnessed parental violence and yet have not gone on to be involved in abusive relationships may also have formed different outcome

expectations regarding abusive behaviors in relationships. Those who witnessed abuse and identified with the victim might instead have the expectation that violence in relationships leads to hurt, fear, and deep disillusionment. These feelings about violence may generalize to all conflict and disagreement in partner relationships, and as a result, individuals with such expectations might attempt to avoid conflict altogether in close relationships.

Alternatively, those who witnessed parental violence and identified with the abuser, yet have not gone on to be abusive, may have still developed more subtly destructive methods of approaching conflict. In other words, those who watch parents hitting each other and see that aggression produces desired rewards in a relationship may not be abusive in adult relationships, but may still follow the model through using less overt aggression in arguments. These individuals could be expected to use more overtly destructive strategies, such as verbal abuse, which in effect may be subtle forms of aggression.

Conflict behaviors in couples relationships are important to consider because there is an association between the way in which partners handle conflict, and their likelihood of having a satisfying, lasting relationship. Schaap (1984, p. 134), in an extensive review of studies comparing distressed and nondistressed couples on interaction patterns, concluded that "distressed couples are predominantly negative in their attitudes and behavior, whereas nondistressed couples are more positive. We see this in their emotional expression, behavior exchange, and problem-solving behavior. Further, we note this particularly in their nonverbal behavior, but also in their verbalization."

Three broad types of conflict behavior include constructive strategies, such as suggesting compromises, destructive strategies, such as becoming verbally aggressive, critical, or defensive, and avoidance strategies, such as refusing to discuss a disagreement. Margolin, Fernandez, Gorin, and Ortiz (1982) interviewed couples regarding their typical responses to conflict situations, and found that the behaviors described fell into the three following categories: 1) Problem Solving, 2) Aggression, and 3) Withdrawal. Examples of Problem Solving behaviors included "Initiate a discussion to air your different points of view," and "State your position clearly." Examples of Aggression responses included "Insult your partner or call him/her names," and "Hit, push, or slap your partner." Finally, examples of Withdrawal responses included "Leave the room or walk away from your partner in the middle of a discussion," and "Think about leaving the relationship altogether."

Previous research has found an association between the use of these specific types of conflict behavior and the degree to which partners are satisfied with their relationship. In general, it has been found that constructive problem-solving behaviors are associated with relationship satisfaction, while destructive and avoidance behaviors are related to relationship distress. Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow (1986b) found that behaviors reflecting the desire to exit the relationship or neglect the problem at hand, such as threatening to leave or ignoring the partner, were associated with relationship distress. In contrast, behaviors reflecting the desire to deal with the problem constructively, such as talking to the partner about differences or compromising to work out a solution, were associated with relationship satisfaction. This relationship was found in both a university

population consisting of dating couples (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986b), as well as in an older adult population made up of couples with more long-term romantic attachments (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986a).

More recent research has found a similar pattern in the association between conflict resolution style and marital satisfaction. Noller and White (1990) compared a group of couples high in marital satisfaction with a group low in satisfaction on conflict resolution patterns. Couples high in satisfaction reported more use of mutual discussion and expression, while those low in satisfaction reported more mutual withdrawal, mutual threat, and mutual blame.

Conflict behaviors have also been found to be associated with relationship quality longitudinally. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that withdrawal from an interaction, stubbornness, and defensiveness were all related to long-term relationship deterioration. More recently, Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, and Callan (1994) assessed couples just before marriage and twice in the two years following marriage with regard to conflict behavior and relationship satisfaction. They found that after two years, couples high in marital satisfaction reported less use of manipulation, avoidance, and coercion than those low in satisfaction.

As described above, it is hypothesized in the present study that those individuals who witnessed parental violence as children will be more likely to use destructive or avoidant strategies, and less likely to use constructive, problem solving strategies when faced with a relationship conflict. Two studies provide preliminary evidence that witnessing parental violence may affect responses to conflict in these ways. Rosenberg

(1987) studied children, ages five to eight, who had witnessed parental battering, and compared them to nonwitness children of the same age on a paper-and-pencil measure of social problem-solving. Children were presented with three situations involving a peer conflict (such as a child wanting to use another child's paintbrush), and social-cognitive skills and problem resolution strategies were assessed.

The author found that compared to children who had witnessed low levels of violence, those who had witnessed high levels of violence did significantly less well on a measure of interpersonal sensitivity. Also, all witnesses of parental violence tended to choose either passive (wait for the other child to offer the paintbrush) or aggressive (grab the paintbrush from the other child) problem-solving strategies rather than more constructive, assertive strategies, such as asking the other child to use the paintbrush when the child was finished.

Burnett and Daniels (1985) also found evidence that witnessing parental violence is related to future conflict-resolution skills. These authors compared young adult men who had witnessed family of origin violence with young men who had not on responses to videotaped simulations of marital conflicts. Responses were considered constructive if they would likely lead to successful conflict resolution, and were scored as destructive if they would likely lead to an escalation of the conflict. They found that participants from nonviolent families of origin responded to significantly more conflict situations in a constructive fashion than did those from violent families of origin.

Although these two studies provide preliminary evidence that family of origin violence is associated with poor conflict resolution skills, their results have limited

generalizability because samples included only children and young men. The present study proposes to expand on such findings by examining conflict resolution behaviors in both young adult men and young adult women.

Efficacy Expectations

Another area of relationships that may be important is the overall efficacy expectations that couples have for being successful in their relationships. Evidence of the importance of such expectations for marital satisfaction has been found. Pretzer, Epstein, and Fleming (1991) investigated efficacy expectations for problem solving in couples with regard to marital dysfunction. It was found that those couples with lower efficacy expectations of their ability to work out problems were higher on indices of marital dysfunction.

Individuals who have witnessed violent conflict between parents on a regular basis may have lower efficacy expectations that problems in relationships can be handled productively. Given that the ability to negotiate differences is an integral component to satisfaction in an intimate relationship, such individuals may have doubts as to the possibility of being happy and successful in a relationship in general.

Summary of Hypotheses

The current study will investigate the hypothesis that individuals who witness parental violence as children evidence problematic patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and expectations in adult couples relationships. Specifically, it is hypothesized first that individuals who were raised witnessing parental violence will be more likely to endorse "disagreement is destructive" beliefs than individuals raised in nonviolent homes.

Second, it is hypothesized that those who witnessed parental violence will be more likely to report the use of avoidant and destructive strategies, and less likely to report using constructive, problem-solving strategies. Finally, it is hypothesized that individuals who viewed interspousal violence as children will exhibit lower efficacy expectations and less optimism about relationships than those who grew up in nonviolent homes.

In order to draw conclusions about the way in which relationship beliefs, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship optimism are affected by witnessing parental violence, two other related influences must be taken into account. As mentioned above, there is evidence that the overall level of conflict in the parental relationship (aside from the level of violence per se) has an important effect on children's behavior and emotional well-being. Likewise, there is evidence that being the recipient of abuse in childhood has important consequences. Both of these variables have been found in previous research to covary with interparental violence (Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lambert, Martino, Anderson, & Sutton, 1991; Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987). Thus, in studying the effects of witnessing parental violence, the overall level of conflict in the parental relationship, as well as the possibility that the individual has been the victim of abuse him or herself, must be controlled for. As such, it is hypothesized that each of the relationships described above will be found after the level of nonviolent parental conflict and the participants' status of being a victim of abuse are taken into account.

Method

Participants

Usable data was collected from 229 participants recruited from introductory

psychology courses at the University of Montana. These individuals were divided using self-report data according to gender and the presence of family of origin violence as follows: 1) male nonwitnesses ($n=80$), 2) male witnesses ($n=26$), 3) female nonwitnesses ($n=84$), and 4) female witnesses ($n=39$). In all, 248 students participated in the study. However, data from 19 participants had to be excluded for the following reasons: eight students were below the specified age of 20; and eleven participants had to be excluded because large portions of one or more of critical questionnaires were missing (3 were missing parental violence information, 4 were missing physical or sexual abuse information, and 4 were missing nonviolent parental discord information). All participants received experimental credits in partial fulfillment of class requirements as compensation for their participation.

Participants had a mean age of 23.5 years. As expected, they were generally highly educated. Most participants indicated that they had had some college (82.1%), while 14.4% indicated having Bachelor's degrees, and 3.5% indicated having advanced degrees. Most participants were Caucasian (86%), single (60.7%), and had no children (83.4%; see Tables 1 and 2 for more complete demographic information, pages 35-36). There were no significant differences between witnesses and nonwitnesses in age or relationship status, however, nonwitnesses were more likely than witnesses to be Caucasian ($\chi^2=4.32$, $df=1$, $p<.05$, $n=229$).

In order to recruit participants, sign-up sheets were made available to all introductory psychology students on the second floor lobby of the Psychology-Pharmacy Building. This lobby is the location generally designated for introductory psychology

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Male Participants

	<u>Witness (n=26)</u>	<u>Nonwitness (n=80)</u>
Age		
Mean	24.7 (SD=7.5)	22.5 (SD=3.5)
Range	20-50	20-37
Race		
Caucasian	20 (76.9%)	74 (92.5%)
African American	1 (3.8%)	1 (1.3%)
Hispanic	3 (11.5%)	1 (1.3%)
Native American	2 (7.7%)	1 (1.3%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.8%)
Education		
Some College	24 (92.3%)	67 (83.8%)
Bachelor's Degree	2 (7.7%)	11 (13.8%)
Advanced Degree	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.5%)
Individual Income		
\$0 to 10,000 per year	19 (73.1%)	61 (77.2%)
\$10 to 20,000 per year	6 (23.1%)	16 (20.0%)
Above \$20,000 per year	1 (3.8%)	2 (2.5%)
Household Income		
\$0 to 10,000 per year	12 (46.2%)	30 (37.5%)
\$10 to 20,000 per year	7 (26.9%)	14 (17.5%)
\$20 to 40,000 per year	2 (7.6%)	11 (13.8%)
\$40 to 60,000 per year	1 (3.8%)	4 (5.1%)
Above \$60,000 per year	4 (15.3%)	19 (23.9%)
Relationship Status		
Single	14 (53.8%)	55 (68.8%)
Married	6 (23.1%)	8 (10.0%)
Living Together	4 (15.4%)	16 (20.0%)
Separated/Divorced	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.3%)
Widowed	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Did not respond	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Number of Children		
0	19 (73.1%)	72 (90.0%)
1	3 (11.5%)	2 (2.5%)
2 or more	4 (15.3%)	4 (5.1%)
Did not respond	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.5%)

Table 2.

Demographic Characteristics of Female Participants

	<u>Witness (n=39)</u>	<u>Nonwitness (n=84)</u>
Age		
Mean	24.05 (SD=7.22)	23.88 (SD=6.31)
Range	20-60	20-43
Race		
Caucasian	31 (79.5%)	72 (85.7%)
African American	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Hispanic	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Native American	6 (2.6%)	3 (3.6%)
Other	1 (2.6%)	9 (10.7%)
Education		
Some College	31 (79.6%)	66 (78.6%)
Bachelor's Degree	6 (15.4%)	14 (16.7%)
Advanced Degree	2 (5.1%)	4 (4.8%)
Individual Income		
\$0 to 10,000 per year	35 (89.7%)	65 (77.4%)
\$10 to 20,000 per year	4 (10.3%)	15 (17.9%)
Above \$20,000 per year	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.6%)
Household Income		
\$0 to 10,000 per year	19 (48.7%)	29 (34.5%)
\$10 to 20,000 per year	7 (17.9%)	17 (20.2%)
\$20 to 40,000 per year	3 (7.7%)	15 (17.8%)
\$40 to 60,000 per year	5 (12.8%)	5 (6.0%)
Above \$60,000 per year	4 (10.2%)	15 (17.9%)
Relationship Status		
Single	22 (56.4%)	48 (57.1%)
Married	7 (17.9%)	10 (11.9%)
Living Together	6 (15.4%)	18 (21.4%)
Separated/Divorced	4 (10.3%)	8 (9.6%)
Widowed	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Did not respond	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Number of Children		
0	31 (79.5%)	69 (82.1%)
1	2 (5.1%)	2 (2.4%)
2 or more	6 (15.5%)	9 (10.8%)
Did not respond	0 (0.0%)	4 (4.8%)

students to sign up for experimental participation, and this is made known to students during the first week of classes. Because the questions asked on one of the measures could only be answered by respondents who had been involved in a couples relationship, this was listed as a requirement for participation on the sign-up sheet. Specifically, in order to participate in this study, individuals had to be 20 years old or older, and must have been involved in a couples relationship after the age of 18 which lasted at least one month.

Participants were divided into witness/nonwitness groups using self-report data gathered in response to several questions concerning the types and frequency of violence witnessed between parents (see Appendix A, p. 96). Questions concerning violence between parents were adapted from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Witnessing violence was defined as having seen or heard physical abuse occurring, or having seen evidence of physical abuse in the appearance of one or both parents. In order to be included in the witness group, participants must have seen or heard at least four mild to moderate acts of violence during their childhood, or must have seen or heard at least one severe act of violence. If the participant was a witness to the abuse only by virtue of seeing the after-effects of the violence, at least one severe act of violence must have occurred. In accordance with guidelines set by the authors of the CTS2, "severe" violence was considered any act as severe as, or more severe than, one parent kicking the other. "Mild to moderate violence" was considered any act as severe as, or less severe than, one parent slapping the other.

No significant risks to participants were anticipated. In light of the sensitive

nature of the information gathered, it was expected that negative feelings and experiences would be brought up for some individuals. In such cases, participants were given the opportunity to discuss any unsettling feelings with the project director, a graduate student in clinical psychology. Several students chose to do this, and shared with the project director that the questions had, in fact, brought up troubling memories for them. Of this group of participants, most stated that they were already receiving therapy to deal with these issues. In all cases, participants were able to adequately deal with their immediate feelings before leaving. In addition, all participants were given a list of counseling resources in order to encourage them to seek further assistance with any disturbing thoughts or feelings which may have been prompted by their involvement in this study.

Measures

The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2). The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) is a 78-item self-report scale designed to assess the types and frequency of tactics used by couples during conflictual interactions. Respondents rate how often they and their partner have engaged in each tactic during the previous year on a seven-point scale (0=Never, 1=Once, 2=Twice, 3=3-5 times, 4=6-10 times, 5=11-20 times, and 6=More than 20 times). The authors divide the instrument into the five following subscales: 1) Negotiation ("I explained my side of a disagreement to my partner"), 2) Psychological Aggression ("I insulted or swore at my partner"), 3) Physical Assault ("I pushed or shoved my partner"), 4) Sexual Coercion ("I made my partner have sex without a condom"), and 5) Injury ("I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner").

In the present study, the CTS2 was used to measure the types and frequency of parental violence witnessed by the participant, and also to measure violence experienced by the participant in his or her own couples relationships. In order to assess parental violence, items from the Physical Assault (see Appendix A, p. 96) and Psychological Aggression (see Appendix B, p. 98) subscales were used and were reworded to reflect actions committed by the parents of the participants (e.g. "Father pushed or shoved mother"). To assess violence experienced in the participants' own relationships, items from all five subscales were administered in their original version (see Appendix C, p. 100).

The CTS2 was found to have good psychometric properties in an initial validation study (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). With regard to the internal consistency of the instrument, the authors reported alpha coefficients for each of the five subscales as follows: 1) Negotiation, .86, 2) Psychological Aggression, .79, 3) Physical Assault, .86, 4) Sexual Coercion, .87, 5) Injury, .95.

In order to assess construct validity, the authors referred to previous research suggesting that men are more likely to use sexually coercive behaviors, and that assaults perpetrated by men are more likely to result in injury. They reasoned, therefore, that physical assault should be more highly correlated with sexual coercion and injury for men than for women. Data from validation research confirmed this prediction, and was cited as evidence for the validity of the instrument. In addition, it was reasoned that measures of physical assault should be negatively correlated with measures of social integration, based on the theory that persons who lack integration into society will be more likely to

commit crimes (e.g. partner assault). The authors found the correlation between a measure of social integration and the Physical Assault Subscale of the CTS2 to be $-.29$, adding further support for the validity of the instrument.

Discriminant validity was assessed by looking at patterns of correlations among the subscales. The authors predicted theoretically that certain pairs of subscales, such as negotiation and sexual coercion, and negotiation and injury should not be correlated. Data confirmed this prediction.

The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC). The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) is a 49-item self-report scale which was designed to measure several aspects of interparental conflict from the child's perspective (see Appendix D, p. 103). Respondents are asked to mark as "true," "sort of true," or "false" statements concerning parental conflict, and their feelings about that conflict. Items fall into nine subscales, each of which pertains to a different aspect of the conflict or its effect on the child. Specifically, subscales measure the following properties of parental conflict: frequency, intensity, degree of resolution, degree to which the content of the argument concerns the child, perceived threat to the child, degree of coping efficacy, degree of self-blame, degree of triangulation, and the degree of perceived stability of the parents' marriage related to the conflict.

In this study, only the items comprising the Frequency, Intensity, and Resolution subscales were used to assess nonviolent parental conflict. All items were administered, however, in order to preserve the original presentation format of the instrument. Items were reworded in the past tense, so that participants could report on the degree of parental

conflict they witnessed while growing up. The CPIC was scored according to standard procedures, and combined scores from the Frequency, Intensity, and Resolution subscales were entered into the regression equation to control for overall parental discord.

In order to assess the psychometric properties of the CPIC, the authors administered the scale to two separate samples ($n=222$ and $n=114$) of fourth and fifth grade children. Coefficient alpha's for the Frequency, Intensity, and Resolution subscales were .70, .82, and .83 respectively, for the first sample, and .68, .80, and .82 for the second sample. The authors, following a factor analysis of the items, also reported the existence of three more general factors. The Frequency, Intensity, and Resolution items were found to load on the same factor, which the authors labeled "Conflict Properties." The two other factors were termed "Threat" (including items from the Threat and Coping Efficacy subscales) and "Self Blame" (including items from the Self Blame and Content subscales). Coefficient alpha's for the two samples, respectively, were as follows: Conflict Properties, .90 and .89, Threat, .83 and .83, and Self Blame, .78 and .84.

In order to assess the validity of the instrument, children's scores on the three CPIC scales were compared with scores on a parent measure of marital conflict, the O'Leary Porter Scale (OPS; Porter & O'Leary, as cited in Grych, Seid & Fincham, 1992), as well as with scores on a parent measure of spousal aggression, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, as cited in Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). Validity was also assessed through comparing children's scores on the three scales of the CPIC with parent and teacher/peer ratings of children's externalizing problems, and with children's as well as teacher/peer ratings of internalizing problems.

Correlations between children's scores on the Conflict Properties scale of the CPIC and parent scores on the OPS and the CTS were .30 and .39, respectively. With regard to the comparisons between CPIC Conflict Properties scale scores and reports of externalizing and internalizing problems for boys, scores on the Conflict Properties scale of the CPIC were found to correlate .30 with parent's reports of children's aggression, .20 with teacher/peer reports of externalizing behavior, .49 with child reports of internalizing problems, and .18 with teacher/peer reports of internalizing behavior. For girls, CPIC Conflict Properties scores were found to correlate .26 with parent's reports of children's aggression, .27 with teacher/peer reports of externalizing behavior, .31 with children's reports of internalizing behavior, and -.23 with teacher/peer reports of internalizing behavior.

The Traumatic Events Survey (TES). The Traumatic Events Survey (Elliott, as cited in Elliott & Briere, 1995) is a 54-item questionnaire which asks respondents to report on the presence of a wide range of possible traumatic life experiences (see Appendix E, p. 105). Items assess such areas as separation from or loss of a parent, being witness to violence, experiencing a natural disaster, and being a victim of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. For some items, the respondent is asked to indicate at what age the event took place, and to rate from zero to three how upsetting the experience was. In the present study, this survey was used to determine which participants had themselves been the victim of physical or sexual abuse, so that these variables could be controlled for statistically. Only items pertaining to physical or sexual abuse were administered. Participants were considered physically abused if they marked "yes" to the first question

on the TES. Participants were considered to have been the victim of child sexual abuse if they marked “yes” to any of questions 6 through 9 of the TES (this required that the abuse include physical contact between victim and perpetrator; see Appendix E, p. 114) No psychometric data could be found on this measure.

The Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI). The Relationship Belief Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) is a 40-item, self-report scale designed to assess irrational beliefs that individuals hold about intimate relationships (see Appendix F, p. 114). Respondents are asked to rate on a five-point scale how strongly they agree with statements regarding relationship beliefs. The RBI is divided into the following five subscales: 1) Disagreement in Destructive ("When my partner and I disagree, I feel like our relationship is falling apart"), 2) Mindreading is Expected ("People who love each other know exactly what each other's thoughts are without a word ever being said"), 3) Partners Cannot Change ("My partner does not seem capable of behaving other than s/he does now"), 4) Sexual Perfectionism ("I get upset if I think I have not completely satisfied my partner sexually"), and 5) the Sexes are Different ("You can't really understand someone of the opposite sex").

The RBI has been widely used in couples research to assess irrational ideas that people hold about relationships (Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Jones & Stanton, 1988; Kurdek, 1993; Pretzer, Epstein, & Fleming, 1991). The authors reported on a study in which 100 couples (52 nonclinical, 48 seeking marital therapy) were used to assess reliability and validity of the instrument (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). They reported that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five subscales ranged from .72 to .81.

With respect to convergent validity, positive correlations (range .11 to .31) were found between four of the five RBI subscales and the Irrational Beliefs Test (IBT; Jones, as cited in Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Although the authors reported these results to be significant, it should be taken into consideration that such correlations mean that the two measures had less than one percent of their variance in common. As such this evidence for convergent validity should be viewed with caution.

To assess construct validity, the authors compared scores on the RBI with scores on a test of marital adjustment. For couples seeking marital therapy, RBI scores were also compared with ratings of likelihood of success in treatment, desire to maintain or terminate the relationship, and interest in conjoint or individual therapy. For all subscales, significant negative correlations (range -.57 to -.18) were found between the RBI and a measure of marital adjustment. Also, for clinical couples, scores on three of the five subscales were significantly negatively related to ratings of likelihood of treatment success (correlations ranging from -.38 to -.60), desire to maintain the marriage relationship (correlations from -.27 to -.51), and interest in conjoint therapy (correlations from -.39 to -.45).

For this study, items were scored according to standard procedures. Scores from the Disagreement is Destructive subscale were used to assess the degree to which participants endorsed beliefs that in general, disagreement is inherently destructive in an intimate relationship.

The Conflict Inventory (CI). The Conflict Inventory (Margolin, Fernandez, Gorin, & Ortiz, 1982) is a 26-item self-report scale designed to measure the frequency with

which partners engage in certain behaviors during a conflictual interaction (see Appendix G, p. 117). Respondents are asked to rate on a seven point scale how often they engage in certain behaviors, with responses ranging from "never" to "almost always." Items were generated through discussions with couples regarding how they respond to conflict. The authors report that 21 of the 26 items fall into three major content categories to form the three following subscales: 1) Problem-solving (e.g. "Initiate a discussion to air your different points of view"), 2) Aggression (e.g. "Insult your partner or call him or her names"), and 3) Withdrawal (e.g. "Leave the room or walk away from your partner in the middle of a discussion").

The CI was designed to be administered to partners separately, with each member of the couple rating the 26 items based on their own as well as their partner's behavior during a discussion. The items have also been used to elicit partners' ratings of how often they would like to engage in each behavior, how often they would like for their partner to engage in each behavior, and how often their partner would like them to engage in the behavior. In this study, only self-ratings of how often behaviors are actually exhibited were used. Items were scored according to standard procedures, yielding a total score for each participant on each of the three subscales.

With regard to internal consistency, the authors reported alpha coefficients of .82 (Problem-solving), .85 (Aggression), and .82 (Withdrawal). Validity of the instrument has been investigated through collecting data on 73 couples. In addition to the CI, couples were given a measure of global marital satisfaction, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, as cited in Margolin, Fernandez, Gorin, & Ortiz, 1982) as well another

measure of conflict behavior, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, as cited in Margolin, Fernandez, Gorin, & Ortiz, 1982). It was found that the CI was useful for discriminating between distressed and nondistressed couples. As expected, distressed couples reported less problem-solving, more aggression, and more withdrawal than did nondistressed couples.

When the relationship between the CI and the DAS was investigated, it was found that scores on all three subscales correlated significantly with DAS scores in the expected directions. For the Problem-solving, Aggression, and Withdrawal subscales, correlations with the DAS scores for wives and husbands were, respectively, .49 and .54, -.43 and -.47, and -.48 and -.60. With regard to the relationship of the CI to the CTS, it was found that ratings on the Problem-solving subscale of the CI correlated .42 with the Reasoning subscale of the CTS. Scores on the Aggression subscale of the CI correlated .54 with the Verbal Aggression subscale of the CTS, and .59 with the Violence subscale of the CTS. The Withdrawal subscale of the CI has no logical counterpart on the CTS, however, it was found to correlate .35 with Verbal Aggression.

The Index of Optimism about Relationships. Participants' feelings regarding the likelihood of finding a rewarding intimate relationship and being able to successfully negotiate problems in that relationship were assessed using a short index comprised of six questions (see Appendix H, p. 123). Individuals were asked to rate on a five-point scale to what degree they agreed with statements reflecting optimism about relationships and conflict in relationships. Items were totaled for each participant and mean scores were used for data analysis.

Procedure

After obtaining students' names and phone numbers from sign-up sheets, prospective participants were contacted by telephone to remind them of the place and time for participation in the study. At that meeting, before data collection, participants were told that they would be taking part in a project designed to assess how adult couples relationships may be affected by childhood experiences. Individuals were informed that they would be asked questions about personal and potentially painful information, and were told that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and that they could withdraw without penalty at any time.

Because it was anticipated that some individuals would be reluctant to reveal information about troubling family experiences, initial instructions included the statement that such experiences are relatively common, and that the purposes of the study would be best served if participants were honest and forthright in answering questions. Participants were also assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Following obtaining informed consent, measures assessing the presence of family of origin violence, parental conflict, traumatic life events, current communication patterns, relationship beliefs, and feelings of optimism about relationships were administered. Participants were administered measures by the project director or an advanced undergraduate student in psychology. When such undergraduate students collected data, the project director was available at all times to be contacted by phone in the event of an emergency. Instructions for participation were given in groups of 12 to 13; however, individuals went to separate rooms to fill out the questionnaires. Total time

to complete the measures ranged from 20 minutes to one hour.

Following completion of the measures, participants were given the opportunity to discuss any residual negative feelings with the project director. They were also debriefed about the purpose of the study and what was hoped to be gained from the information gathered (see Appendix I, p. 124). Finally, they were thanked for their participation and given the appropriate documentation for experimental credit.

Results

As stated above, complete data was collected from 229 participants, 106 males and 123 females. Of the male participants, 26 (24.5%) met the criteria to be considered witnesses of parental violence. Of the females, 39 (31.7%) met witness criteria. Data on whether participants were themselves victims of physical or sexual abuse while growing up is summarized in Table 3 (page 49). Overall, 27% of men and 37% of women reported being physically abused, while 19% of men and 39% of women reported being sexually abused before the age of 18.

Means and standard deviations for all dependent measures by witness status and gender are listed in Table 4 (page 50). Scores from all scales of all measures are listed as average scores. On the RBI, higher scores reflect higher levels of the belief that disagreement is inherently destructive to a relationship. Participants in general endorsed low levels of this belief. When compared to normative data for the RBI (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982), scores of the present sample were somewhat higher than that of a nonclinical sample of couples, but somewhat lower than that of the clinical sample (present sample average total=11.19, nonclinical sample=10.70, clinical sample=15.64).

Table 3.

Presence of Physical and Sexual Abuse History Among Participants

Men		
	<u>Witness (n=26)</u>	<u>Nonwitness (n=80)</u>
Physical Abuse	15 (57.7%)	14 (17.5%)
Sexual Abuse	9 (34.6%)	11 (13.8%)
Overall Abuse	17 (65.4%)	20 (25.0%)
Women		
	<u>Witness (n=39)</u>	<u>Nonwitness (n=84)</u>
Physical Abuse	26 (66.7%)	19 (22.6%)
Sexual Abuse	19 (48.7%)	29 (34.5%)
Overall Abuse	32 (82.1%)	40 (47.6%)

Table 4.

Descriptives of Dependent Variables by Gender and Witness Status

	Men			
	<u>Witness (n=26)</u>		<u>Nonwitness (n=80)</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>
RBI-DD	1.26	.78	1.29	.71
CI-PS	4.23	.73	4.19	.62
CI-WD	1.98	.76	1.88	.88
CI-AG	.71	.55	.63	.42
IOAR-R	1.71	.76	1.84	1.06
IOAR-C	1.77	.62	1.79	.81

	Women			
	<u>Witness (n=39)</u>		<u>Nonwitness (n=84)</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>
RBI-DD	1.54	.76	1.47	.70
CI-PS	4.01	.65	4.18	.62
CI-WD	2.23	.94	1.97	.90
CI-AG	.98	.81	.89	.61
IOAR-R	1.85	1.11	2.04	1.22
IOAR-C	1.85	.72	1.95	.94

RBI-DD=Relationship Belief Inventory Disagreement is Destructive Scale; CI=Conflict Inventory (PS=Problem Solving, WD=Withdrawal, AG=Aggression); IOAR=Index of Optimism about Relationships (R=Relationship Optimism, C=Conflict Optimism)

With regard to conflict resolution strategies (CI data), participants in general reported making frequent use of problem-solving behaviors (initiating discussions, attentive listening), occasional use of withdrawal strategies (act as though nothing happened, leave the room), and very infrequent use of aggressive responses (blaming, insulting, physical aggression). Data from the present sample on the CI was similar to that for all three subscales collected from a normative sample (Margolin, Fernandez, Gorin, & Ortiz, 1982), with the exception that the participants from the present study reported fewer aggressive behaviors than participants from the normative sample. This makes sense in light of the fact that participants from the present study were largely young and had never been married, whereas participants from the Margolin et al. (1982) sample were, on average, older (mean=41.1 years) and married (mean number of years married=15.1). Thus, participants from the present sample would have had fewer opportunities for aggression to arise in relationships.

Because the Index of Optimism About Relationships (IOAR) was designed specifically for the present study, normative data is not available for comparisons. However, participants in general endorsed moderate to strong agreement with statements reflecting optimism about finding fulfilling relationships, and about being able to successfully negotiate disagreements in relationships when they arise.

Relationships Among Independent Variables

Independent samples t-tests were performed for both men and women to determine whether witnesses and nonwitnesses differed significantly with regard to reported level of nonviolent parental discord. Results indicated that participants who

witnessed violence between parents reported significantly higher levels of nonviolent parental discord as well. This finding was true for both men ($t=-8.46, p<.0001, n=106$) and women ($t=-7.99, p<.0001, n=123$).

In order to uncover any significant relationships among the witness and abuse variables, chi-square tests were performed comparing witness status and physical abuse, and witness status and sexual abuse. Among male participants, witnesses were significantly more likely to have experienced both physical ($\chi^2=15.95, df=1, p<.0001, n=106$) and sexual ($\chi^2=5.58, df=1, p<.05, n=106$) abuse than nonwitnesses. Among females, witnesses were significantly more likely to have experienced physical abuse than nonwitnesses ($\chi^2=22.27, df=1, p<.0001, n=123$), however, this difference was not significant for sexual abuse ($\chi^2=2.26, df=1, p=.133, n=123$).

Relationships Among Dependent Measures

Correlations among all dependent measures are listed in Table 5 (page 53). In general, the belief that disagreement is destructive was negatively related to problem solving behaviors, and positively related to withdrawal and aggressive behaviors on the CI. In addition, this belief was associated with having lower levels of optimism about relationships. Problem solving was negatively related to withdrawal and aggression on the CI, and positively related to relationship optimism.

Gender Differences

T-tests were performed in order to determine whether there were any meaningful differences between men and women on any of the dependent variables. Significant gender differences were found on several measures. Specifically, on the RBI, women

Table 5.

Correlations Among Dependent Measures

	CI-PS	CI-WD	CI-AG	IOAR-R	IOAR-C	CPICS
RBI-DD	-.150*	.472**	.410**	.316**	.345**	.192**
CI-PS		-.237**	-.174**	-.146*	-.344**	-.092
CI-WD			.541**	.235**	.333**	.194**
CI-AG				.223**	.332**	.194**
IOAR-R					.463**	.056
IOAR-C						.090

RBI-DD=Relationship Belief Inventory Disagreement is Destructive Scale; CI=Conflict Inventory (PS=Problem Solving, WD=Withdrawal, AG=Aggression); IOAR=Index of Optimism about Relationships (R=Relationship Optimism, C=Conflict Optimism); CPICS=Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

were significantly more likely to endorse disagreement is destructive beliefs than men ($t=-2.15, p<.05, n=226$). On the CI, women reported significantly more use of aggressive strategies during conflict than men ($t=-3.59, p<.001, n=228$). Chi square tests were performed to uncover any gender differences among witness and abuse variables. No significant differences were found between men and women with regard to witness status or being the victim of physical abuse in childhood, however, significantly more females than males reported being sexually abused while growing up ($\chi^2=11.08, df=1, p<.001, n=229$).

Impact of Witness Status

It was hypothesized that witnessing parental violence in childhood would be associated with certain dysfunctional beliefs and behaviors in adult couples relationships. Specifically, it was expected that those who witnessed interparental violence would endorse more disagreement is destructive beliefs, more destructive and avoidant conflict resolution strategies, fewer constructive conflict resolution strategies, and less optimism regarding relationships than those who did not witness parental violence. In order to test these predictions, t-tests were performed comparing witnesses and nonwitnesses on each of the three dependent variables: 1) disagreement is destructive beliefs, 2) conflict resolution behaviors, and 3) relationship and conflict optimism. An alpha level of .05 was used for all tests.

Witnesses and nonwitnesses did not differ significantly on any of the relationship beliefs or behaviors investigated ($t=-.41, ns$, disagreement is destructive belief; $t=.94, ns$,

problem-solving behaviors; $t=-1.56$, ns, avoidant behaviors; $t=-1.29$, ns, aggressive behaviors; $t=.90$, ns, relationship optimism; $t=.48$, ns, conflict optimism). This raised the question of whether there might be interaction effects between witnessing violence and other independent variables. Specifically, it seemed possible that the gender and parental divorce variables might interact with witness status in this way. In order to explore this question, 2 by 2 factorial ANOVA's were performed for each dependent variable. One set of analyses included witness status and gender as independent variables, while the other used witness status and parental divorce as independent variables. No significant interactions were found. Thus, the fact that no significant relationships were found between witnessing violence and any of the dependent measures could not be explained by interaction effects.

Impact of Nonviolent Parental Discord, Childhood Abuse, and Parental Divorce

As explained above, it was hypothesized initially that witnessing violence would be significantly related to the beliefs and behaviors under consideration. If this relationship had borne out, the next step would have been to look at the relationship of witness status to each dependent variable after controlling for comorbid variables, such as nonviolent parental discord, parental divorce, and being the victim of physical or sexual abuse. Since no relationship between witnessing violence and any of the dependent variables was found, these more complex analyses were not performed. However, because data were collected on each of the planned "control" variables, it seemed worthwhile to investigate whether any of these variables was related to relationship beliefs and behaviors. Several findings were of interest.

Pearson correlations were computed to look at the relationships between nonviolent parental discord and each dependent variable. Nonviolent parental discord was significantly and positively correlated to Disagreement is Destructive scores ($r=.19$, $p<.01$, $n=226$) as well as to scores on the Withdrawal and Aggression subscales of the CI ($r=.20$, $p<.01$, $n=228$ and $r=.20$, $p<.01$, $n=228$, respectively). In order to investigate whether either abuse variable was related to any of the dependent variables, t-tests were performed comparing abused and nonabused participants on each variable. It was found that individuals who were physically abused in childhood were significantly more likely to report the use of withdrawal and nonviolent aggressive strategies during relationship conflicts than individuals who were not physically abused ($t=-2.13$, $p<.05$, $n=228$ and $t=-2.52$, $p<.05$, $n=228$, respectively). In addition, individuals who were victims of child sexual abuse were significantly more likely to report use of withdrawal conflict behaviors than nonvictims ($t=-3.50$, $p=.001$, $n=228$).

T -tests were also performed in order to investigate the relationship of parental divorce to each dependent variable. It was found that parental divorce was significantly related to the belief that disagreement is destructive ($t=2.19$, $p<.05$, $n=220$). Interestingly, participants who reported that they had experienced their parents' divorce before the age of 18 reported a lower level of the disagreement is destructive belief than those who reported that their parents had not divorced.

Witnessing Parental Violence and Use of Violence in Later Relationships

In order to determine how the results of the present study would compare to

previous findings concerning the intergenerational transmission of relationship violence, 2 by 2 factorial ANOVA's were performed, using gender and witness status as independent variables. The dependent variables included the frequency of violence used oneself in intimate relationships, as well as the frequency of violence used by one's partner. Both of these variables were computed using average total scores from the Physical Aggression subscale of the CTS2. Means and standard deviations for these scores are listed in Table 6 (page 58).

Main effects for both witness status and gender were found for participants' reports of their own use of violence in relationships, but not for reports of violence perpetrated by partners. Witnesses were significantly more likely to report using violence against a partner than nonwitnesses ($F=6.38$; $df=1$, $p<.05$, $n=226$), and women were significantly more likely to report using violence than men ($F=3.95$, $df=1$, $p<.05$, $n=226$). On the average, however, reported use of relationship violence by all groups of participants was relatively low (see Table 6). No significant interactions were found between witness and gender variables with regard to relationship violence.

Discussion

The results of this study did not support the initial hypothesis that witnessing violence in childhood is related to certain dysfunctional relationship beliefs and behaviors in young adulthood. Possible reasons for this pattern of findings will be discussed. In addition, significant findings concerning comorbid childhood risk factors (nonviolent parental discord, parental divorce, and being the victim of physical or sexual abuse) will

Table 6.

Presence of Relationship Violence Among Participants

Men				
	Witnesses		Nonwitnesses	
	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>
Self violence	.22	.33	.08	.18
Partner violence	.38	.55	.28	.67

Women				
	Witnesses		Nonwitnesses	
	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>
Self violence	.32	.55	.19	.38
Partner violence	.61	1.10	.44	.90

Note: Scores above are average scores taken from participant ratings on the Physical Aggression subscale of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale. Participants make ratings of the frequency of violent behaviors according to the following scale: 0=Never happened, 1=Once, 2=Twice, 3=3-5 times, 4=6-10 times, 5=11-20 times, 6=More than 20 times. Self violence=Participants own use of violent behaviors; Partner violence=Partner use of violent behaviors.

be explored in relation to current research and theory.

The Impact of Witnessing Parental Violence on Relationship Beliefs and Behaviors

Surprisingly, witnessing parental violence was not significantly related to any of the beliefs or behaviors explored in the current study, namely, the belief that relationship disagreement is inherently destructive, the use of problem-solving, avoidant, or destructive conflict resolution behaviors, optimism about relationship conflict, and general relationship optimism. Furthermore, this lack of relationship could not be explained by interaction effects with gender or parental divorce variables. What might account for this pattern of findings? At least four possible explanations should be considered: 1) witnessing parental violence may in fact not be related to the particular relationship beliefs and behaviors investigated in the present study, 2) witnessing violence may have an effect on these particular relationship beliefs and behaviors, but this effect was not found in the current study because of the specific population sampled, 3) the effect of witnessing violence on these relationship beliefs and behaviors was difficult to uncover because of limited variability in the dependent variables, and 4) the effect of witnessing violence on relationship behaviors may be difficult to uncover because of participants' biases with regard to reporting undesirable behaviors. Each of these explanations will be discussed in turn.

The first possibility to consider is that witnessing parental violence in childhood does not have long-term effects on the particular beliefs and behaviors studied in the current investigation. For example, it may be that witnessing parental violence does not

necessarily lead to the belief that disagreement is inherently destructive in a relationship because there are many other influences on the development of this type of relationship belief. People who grow up with violent parents may have experiences which counteract the influence of parental models, such as observing other, more positive conflict interactions in friend's families or extended families. Other possible influences on the formation of beliefs about disagreement include positive experiences in working out conflicts with parents or peers.

These types of experiences would be likely to lead not only to more positive beliefs about relationship disagreement, but also to more positive conflict resolution skills. Observing interparental relationships in the families of one's peers or in the extended family may provide opportunities for the acquisition of alternative, more effective problem-solving behaviors. Peer and dating relationships, in turn, may serve as forums for the practicing and strengthening of these acquired skills. In this way, children may be able to form positive conflict resolution skills in close relationships despite witnessing parental violence in their own nuclear family. As such, the likelihood of these individuals developing avoidant or destructive behaviors may not be as great as expected.

People who grow up with violent parents may also be able to avoid developing the belief that disagreement is inherently destructive in a relationship by making very specific attributions about the causes of violent parental behaviors, thereby averting the idea that parental models will necessarily apply to them. For example, people may attribute their parents' behaviors during disagreements to reasons such as, "My father did that because he drinks too much," or "My parents must have been particularly poorly suited to one

another.” By viewing parents as fundamentally different from themselves in the ways that they relate to others, children may be able to form positive views on how conflict can be handled constructively.

Past research related to this idea has pointed to what is known as the “just-world hypothesis,” or the idea that individuals have a need to believe that, in general, people get what they deserve in life (Lerner & Miller, 1978). In theory, this belief allows people to deal with the pain that they observe in the world through assuming that being a good person will protect them from negative events, and attributing another’s pain to that person’s specific flaws or bad character. Previous studies have applied this hypothesis to understanding people’s attributions of the occurrence of rape (Best & Demmin, 1983), and AIDS (Anderson, 1992), among other things. In addition, this theory may partially explain the results of the current study, in that witnesses of parental violence may attribute their parents’ painful relationships to their own specific flaws, and may essentially say to themselves, “That won’t happen to me because I am a good person.” In this way, they may be able to maintain a positive outlook on what their own relationships will be like. This hypothesis seems particularly relevant to the optimism variables studied, in that most participants, regardless of witness status, reported a high level of optimism about being able to resolve conflicts and about relationships in general. Participants in the current study were, on the average, relatively young (mean age=23.5), and therefore have probably been involved in relatively few couples relationships in general. This factor may further explain the high level of optimism expressed, in that participants have had relatively few opportunities to experience destructive relationships.

As stated above, in the present study, witnessing parental violence was not related to any of the particular beliefs and behaviors under investigation. However, this does not preclude the possibility that this experience is related to other types of relationship beliefs and behaviors. For example, witnessing violence may be related to an individual's standards for appropriate boundaries in a relationship (e.g., degree of sharing versus independence in a relationship), an individual's expectations for the balance of power and control (e.g., the degree to which each partner should have an impact on decision-making within the relationship), or an individual's belief about the importance of long-term investment in or commitment to the relationship (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, & Burnett, 1996). Other types of conflict resolution behaviors which may be related to witnessing parental violence may include the use of violence oneself (addressed below), or involvement in particular patterns of conflict behavior, such as a demand-withdraw interactional style (e.g. Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Future research could be directed towards investigating whether witnessing parental violence is related to these alternative types of relationship beliefs and behaviors.

The second explanation to consider is the possibility that witnessing parental violence does have a long-term effect on the dysfunctional relationship beliefs and behaviors investigated, but that this relationship was not found in the particular population sampled. It is possible that this study sampled a relatively high-functioning group of witnesses to parental violence. The fact that witnesses in this study were pursuing college degrees suggests that they may be a particularly resilient group of individuals, especially in light of the fact that witnesses of violence were also likely to

have experienced several other risk factors, such as physical or sexual abuse, or a high level of nonviolent parental conflict. As such, witnessing violence may be related to dysfunctional relationship beliefs and behaviors in a less high-functioning sample of participants.

A related explanation is that the lack of relationship between witnessing parental violence and the beliefs and behaviors studied was due to the limited variability in the dependent variables. In general, the great majority of participants reported low levels of the belief that disagreement is destructive, frequent use of positive problem-solving behaviors, infrequent use of avoidant and aggressive behaviors, and a high level of relationship and conflict optimism. While conceptually this is a positive state of affairs, it creates the problem of limited variability, and may obscure any true relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Finally, a third explanation to consider is the possibility of reporting biases. This explanation seems especially relevant to the reporting of conflict resolution behaviors. People are probably reluctant to admit the use of negative, socially undesirable behaviors such as yelling, insulting, blaming, or leaving the room during a discussion. As such, participants may have overestimated their use of positive behaviors, such as suggesting compromises and listening to one's partner, while underestimating their use of more destructive tactics. In this way, reporting biases may be another factor obscuring the relationship between witnessing parental violence and later relationship variables.

Nonviolent Parental Discord, Abuse, and Parental Violence: Comorbid Risk Factors

The present study found that witnessing violence in childhood was strongly related to both nonviolent parental discord and to being the victim of physical or sexual abuse oneself in childhood. The correlation between witnessing violence and level of nonviolent discord was quite high ($r=.61$). Likewise, the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse among those witnessing violence was high; 82 percent of female witnesses and 65 percent of male witnesses reported being abused physically or sexually before the age of 18. These findings indicate that individuals who are witness to parental violence are also subject to several other important risk factors, such as a high level of nonviolent conflict, and physical or sexual victimization.

Given the high likelihood of co-occurrence in these variables, it is very difficult to study their separate effects on constructs such as relationship beliefs and behaviors. Extremely large numbers of participants would need to be recruited in order to be confident about conclusions drawn with regard to any unique effects. In addition, one wonders whether it even makes sense to attempt to study the separate effect of any one risk factor, such as parental violence, since it so rarely occurs in the absence of the others (one could even argue that parental violence probably never occurs in the absence of a high level of verbal conflict). In trying to uncover the influence of any one variable, we may be attempting to study something that is not very applicable to the lives of real individuals.

The Impact of Nonviolent Parental Discord on Relationship Beliefs and Behaviors

Although participants did not differ in reports of relationship beliefs and behaviors with respect to whether they had witnessed parental violence, the level of nonviolent parental discord was significantly related to several of the dependent variables studied. It should be noted, however, that even where significant, such relationships were small. Nevertheless, witnessing a high level of frequent, intense, and unresolved (but nonviolent) parental conflict was associated with higher levels of the belief that disagreement is destructive, and more frequent use of aggressive and avoidant strategies during relationship conflicts. These findings extend previous research on the detrimental effects of parental conflict on children (e.g. Grych & Fincham, 1990) by suggesting that such effects may be long-term, and may be relational in nature.

In order to understand the relationship between parental discord and the belief that disagreement is destructive, it is helpful to refer to learning principles. Items comprising the Disagreement is Destructive subscale of the RBI reflect feelings of distress during times of relationship disagreement (e.g. “I get very upset when my partner and I cannot see things the same way”) as well as a general fear that something terrible will happen. Initially, witnessing parental discord in childhood may be the primary stimulus eliciting the response of fear and distress. Over time, this stimulus may generalize, so that all occurrences of relational conflict acquire the ability to elicit fear and distress. Similarly, conflict in one’s own intimate relationship would probably also elicit such a response.

The relationship between parental discord and believing that disagreement is

destructive might also reflect social learning principles. According to Bandura (1977), people form “outcome expectancies” about what will happen in a given situation based on observing what happens with others in similar situations. It seems likely that witnessing a high level of intense, unresolved conflict between parents would lead to the “outcome expectancy” that bad things happen when people disagree. This expectancy would be particularly understandable in cases where bad things do happen when parents fight, such as one parent not talking to the other, or one parent taking anger at the other parent out on other family members.

Social learning principles also seem relevant to the association between parental discord and later use of aggressive (nonviolent) conflict resolution behaviors. It is possible that witnesses of a high level of parental conflict often saw aggressive behaviors (insulting, yelling, criticizing) result in rewards for the aggressor (e.g. increased power in the relationship), thus making it more likely that they would engage in such behaviors themselves. This process is similar to that described in initial work by Bandura, Ross, & Ross (1963), in which children were more likely to imitate aggressive models when the models were rewarded for their actions. The present findings extends these ideas by suggesting that modeling effects are long-term in nature.

As stated above, the level of nonviolent parental discord was also related to participants reports of using avoidant behaviors in conflicts. This relationship may be explained by trauma theories, to the extent that witnessing a high level of parental discord can be considered a traumatic experience. In fact, the DSM-IV diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder includes the criterion of “persistent avoidance of stimuli

associated with the trauma” including “efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings or conversations associated with the trauma” (APA, 1994, p. 428). It seems likely that current relationship disagreements serve as cues for calling up traumatic experiences of parental conflict, and for that reason elicit avoidance responses.

One issue that arises at this point is the seeming inconsistency in the fact that witnessing nonviolent parental conflict was related to dysfunctional beliefs and behaviors in adulthood, but witnessing violence was not. One would think that a more dramatic display of parental conflict (i.e. violence) would result in even stronger beliefs about the destructiveness of conflict, and even more use of avoidant and aggressive conflict behaviors. As noted above, this was not the case. This pattern of findings is difficult to account for. One explanation for this pattern of findings is that relationship issues become particularly salient for individuals whose parents’ conflicts resulted in dramatic displays of violence, more so than for individuals who observed only nonviolent conflict. As such, they may be more motivated than witnesses of nonviolent conflict to actively seek out ways to succeed where their parents failed. This act of seeking out more positive ways of relating around conflict would be likely to lead to more positive beliefs about conflict, as well as to more positive conflict behaviors. Thus, although it seems somewhat counterintuitive, witnesses of violence may actually develop more healthy relationship beliefs and behaviors than those who witnessed only nonviolent discord.

The Effects of Childhood Abuse on Conflict Resolution Behaviors

Two findings which are not related to the main hypotheses of the study, but which

deserve mention, are the associations between child sexual abuse and withdrawal behaviors during conflict, and between physical abuse and aggressive conflict behaviors. The fact that sexual abuse predicted withdrawal behaviors is consistent with the results of past research on the long-term relational effects of child sexual abuse. Waltz (1996) found that women who had a sexual abuse history showed reduced levels of emotional expressiveness and engagement during observations of conflict discussions. Such reduced expressiveness and engagement may be thought of as an avoidance, or withdrawal, behavior with respect to relationship conflict. A recently introduced model of the long-term effects of child sexual abuse centers around this idea of emotional avoidance and proposes that one of the most pervasive and troubling aftereffects of sexual abuse is the tendency for victims to avoid thoughts, memories, and affective states associated with abuse experiences (Polusny & Follette, 1995) . As such, survivors of sexual abuse may be more likely to use withdrawal behaviors during relationship conflicts because such conflicts create an affective state which is reminiscent of previous abuse.

The association between being physically abused in childhood and using aggressive responses in one's own relationships is also consistent with previous findings in this area (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990; Murphy, Meyer, & O'Leary, 1993). Dodge, Bates, and Pettit (1993) propose that being physically abused leads to later aggressiveness through having an effect on social information-processing. According to this theory, physical abuse early in life leads a child to believe that the world is a threatening place, and this in turn leads to an overall hypervigilance to threatening cues in the environment. Thus, such an individual would be more likely to attribute hostile intentions to others and

to respond in an aggressive manner him or herself.

The Effects of Parental Divorce on Relationship Beliefs

Parental divorce was found to be significantly related to the dysfunctional belief that disagreement is destructive. Interestingly, those who reported that their parents divorced reported a lower level of the belief that disagreement is destructive than those whose parents had not divorced. This finding is somewhat counterintuitive. Given “outcome expectancies” that would be likely to form after parental discord culminates in a divorce, one would expect that a child would be more likely to believe that disagreements are inherently destructive to a relationship.

One explanation for this findings might be that in particularly discordant marriages, divorce may not seem like a “destructive” outcome to a child. In other words, when parental conflict is high, children might be less likely to form negative relationship beliefs when parents divorce than when they remain together. However, for this explanation to be supported, a significant interaction between the nonviolent discord and divorce variables would need to be present. This was not the case. Instead, the data suggests that divorce, independent of the amount of nonviolent parental conflict, predicts less dysfunctional beliefs about conflict.

What might account for this relationship? One possibility is that, as mentioned above concerning those who witnessed violence, relationship issues in general become particularly salient for individuals whose parents divorce, and that such individuals may be especially motivated to learn positive ways of interacting in their own relationships, in

order to succeed where their parents failed. This process of actively seeking out relationship-enhancing information would be likely to lead to more positive beliefs about conflict and about relationships in general. This explanation seems especially relevant for the participants of this study, given that the majority were in a stage of life (early 20's) where establishing an identity separate from parents may be particularly important.

Witnessing Parental Violence and Later Relationship Violence

Although the main purpose of the present study was to look at the relationship of witnessing parental violence to relationship beliefs and nonviolent conflict resolution behaviors, measures were also included to investigate the relationship of witnessing violence to participants' own use of violence, in order to find out whether results would be consistent with previous research in this area. It was found that witnesses were more likely to report using violence in their own relationships than nonwitnesses, and women were more likely to report using violence than men.

Previous research in this area has looked at the different outcomes of witnessing parental violence in men and women. Most studies on men have looked at whether witnesses are more likely to perpetrate violence than nonwitnesses, while the majority of studies on women have looked at whether witnesses are more likely to be victims of abuse than nonwitnesses. As outlined previously in this paper, studies on men have consistently found an association between witnessing and perpetrating violence (Howell & Pugliesi, 1988; Murphy, Meyer, & O'Leary, 1993; Stith & Farley, 1993). However, results from studies on the relationship in women between witnessing violence and later

being a victim of violence have not been as clear. There is some evidence of a positive relationship between these two variables (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986); however, other studies have not corroborated these findings (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990; Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981).

The current study is in line with research supporting a relationship between witnessing violence and using violence oneself in a later relationship. Furthermore, the results were not gender specific; both men and women who witnessed violence between parents as children were more likely to report perpetrating violent acts in their own relationships. In addition, there was no support for the idea that witnessing violence makes one more likely to be the victim of abuse in later relationships. Again, this finding was true for both men and women.

Overall, participants' reports of their own use of violence indicated that levels of this type of action were very low. The average number of violent acts perpetrated by participants in all of their relationships combined was less than one (see Table 6), even for witnesses. Nevertheless, the difference between witness and nonwitness groups was statistically significant. This finding provides evidence for a social learning theory of partner aggression, which states that witnesses of violence learn that use of violence leads to the acquisition of desired rewards in a relationship, and that they are therefore more likely to engage in such learned behaviors in their own relationships. The relationship between these two variables might also reflect deficits in social problem solving, faulty models of attachment, or a lack of empathy for one's partner. In any case, the present findings emphasize the need for interventions with child witnesses of parental violence.

Such interventions should provide new learning experiences for children surrounding conflict, and foster positive problem solving skills, so that the intergenerational transmission of violence can be stopped.

This study found that overall, women were more likely to report perpetrating violence in their relationships than men. This finding is in line with previous studies looking at gender differences in relationship violence (O'Leary et al., 1989; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Magdol et al., 1997). Explanations for this gender difference in aggressive behaviors have included the societal taboo against male to female violence, as well as the fact that women may have less fear of the legal consequences of violent or aggressive behaviors. This issue is discussed further below in the section on gender differences.

It is important to note that just looking at gender differences in the overall number of violent acts perpetrated is somewhat misleading. Although women have been shown to perpetrate more violent acts than men, women's use of partner violence has been found to occur more often as an act of self-defense than men's (Campbell, 1993). Furthermore, research shows that women's use of violence is less likely to result in injury than men's (Stets and Straus, 1990), and that women are more likely to report fear of their partners than are men (O'Leary & Curley, 1986). The present study did not take into account whether acts of violence were used in self-defense, the consequences of the violent acts reported, or the level of fear being experienced, and this should be kept in mind when considering the present findings on gender differences in use of partner violence.

Gender Differences

As described above, there were no significant interaction effects between witnessing violence and gender on any of the dependent variables. This means that, in general, men and women in this study did not appear to be affected differently by the experience of witnessing parental violence. Although they are not directly related to the main hypotheses, several gender differences in the dependent variables overall are of interest.

Men and women were found to differ significantly in the degree to which they reported disagreement is destructive beliefs, with women reporting a higher level of these beliefs than men. This finding is at odds with previous studies comparing men and women on this measure. One (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992) reported that men were significantly more likely to endorse disagreement is destructive beliefs than women, and another reported no gender differences on this scale (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993). One reason for the difference found in this study may be related to women's reporting greater use of aggressive strategies during conflicts, discussed below. It may be that the present sample of women are more likely to view disagreement as destructive because it is more likely to lead to conflict strategies which are often, in fact, destructive to a relationship, such as blaming, criticizing, and insulting the other partner.

Another difference found between men and women in the current study was, as mentioned above, the tendency for women to report the use of more aggressive strategies during conflict. Previous research on gender differences in conflict resolution strategies

has by and large focused on the use of violence. Earlier studies reported that men were more likely to use violence in partner interactions than women (Gayford, 1975; Rounsaville, 1978). However, more recent information suggests that women are at least as likely if not more likely to use violence as their male counterparts (O'Leary et al., 1989; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Magdol et al., 1997). In the current study, items from the aggression scale of the CI focused mainly on nonviolent strategies, such as the use of blame or insults. Thus, the present results are in line with more recent research, and expand on such studies by suggesting that women may perpetrate more nonviolent aggression as well as more violence than men.

Several possible reasons for the difference in the initiation of violence between men and women were given by Magdol et al. (1997). For instance, they argued that expectations about the consequences of violence may differ for men and women. Since past research has shown that men's partner violence is more likely to result in injury than women's (Stets & Straus, 1990), it may be that men understand that their likelihood of inflicting serious injury or of being prosecuted is high, and may therefore have reason to constrain their violent feelings. Alternatively, it may be that men's socialization prohibits the use of violence against a weaker target, and men are therefore less likely to initiate an assault against a woman. Women, on the other hand, may perceive few social restraints concerning assaultive behavior toward men, and may not perceive that there will be serious consequences to their violent actions (injury, legal trouble). They may therefore be more likely to initiate aggressive acts. More subtle aggressive actions, such as blaming or criticizing, may be used more commonly among women for similar reasons.

Clinical Implications

What are the clinical implications of the findings of this study? In working with couples, it seems especially important to carefully assess what types of risk factors partners have been exposed to in early family experiences, and to tailor intervention strategies accordingly. Individuals who have been witness to a high level of nonviolent parental discord may be more likely than individuals from low conflict homes to have developed the belief that disagreement is inherently destructive in a relationship, and to experience fear and distress when conflicts arise. As such, therapeutic interventions could include cognitive restructuring around black-and-white conflict beliefs. Time could be spent searching for evidence for and against the belief that conflict is inherently destructive, emphasizing examples of disagreements which lead to constructive changes in relationships.

Couples interventions for clients who observed a high level of nonviolent parental conflict should also provide direct experiences for partners in which conflict is not destructive. Such interventions could include problem-solving training aimed at teaching partners to approach disagreements in a nonjudgmental, objective manner. Also, empathic joining around problems should be emphasized, in which both partners are encouraged to understand and reflect back emotions about problem situations. These interventions may turn relationship conflict into a vehicle for increased closeness, and may lessen the degree to which partners hold the belief that conflict is inherently destructive, as well as the degree to which they feel distressed during conflictual interactions.

In addition to having an effect on beliefs about conflict, witnessing nonviolent parental discord may also lead to increased use of avoidant and aggressive (nonviolent) conflict behaviors. Clinical interventions with couples in which one or both partners come from high conflict homes should therefore also include education about and demonstration of positive conflict resolution skills. Behavioral rehearsal could be used to strengthen such skills once they are acquired, with the therapist intervening to help partners modify destructive behaviors (blaming, criticizing), and to block avoidance behaviors.

For couples in which one or both partners are victims of child sexual abuse, avoidance behaviors may occur because the affective state present during relationship conflicts is reminiscent of the abuse situation(s). As such, interventions may need to include exposure to conflict in a safe environment in order to lessen this unwanted affective arousal. Such interventions would be similar to exposure techniques proposed recently by Foa, Rothbaum, and Steketee (1993) and Resick and Schnicke (1993) for decreasing avoidance behaviors in victims of trauma. Interventions with individuals who were physically abused as children may need to focus more on the modification of aggressive conflict resolution behaviors, such as blaming, insulting, or criticizing one's partner. Such clients could be educated on the social information-processing theory of aggressive behavior described above. Perceptions and attributions in conflict situations should be explored, to determine whether there is an increased tendency to attribute hostile intent to the partner's actions. Cognitive restructuring techniques could be used to modify this tendency and hopefully reduce the number of destructive responses.

For couples in which one or both partners witnessed parental violence growing up, the clinical implications are less clear. Although this experience was not found to be related to the particular beliefs and behaviors studied in the present investigation, it may be that it is related to other important aspects of couples' functioning. For example, it has been found in past research and in the present study that witnessing parental violence is related to the use of violence in one's own couples relationships. As such, many of the techniques described above (cognitive restructuring, training and education in conflict resolution skills) would be helpful as preventative measures against relationship violence in couples where one or both partners witnessed parental violence in their families of origin.

In addition to having implications for work with adult couples, the results of the present study highlight the need for early interventions with children of high conflict marriages, as well as with children who have been the victim of physical or sexual abuse. In addition, given the relationship between witnessing parental violence and use of violence later in one's own relationships, interventions should also be designed for children of violent marriages. Other researchers have already begun to emphasize the need for interventions with children exposed to violence, and have suggested that this movement needs to begin with community efforts to reduce violence, including changing public policies and values concerning violence, and making treatment more available for families experiencing violence (Osofsky & Fenichel, 1994).

The present study adds to this literature by suggesting that such efforts include children who have experienced or been exposed to violence, as well as children who have

been witness to a high level of nonviolent parental conflict. These interventions should emphasize relational components, such as work on problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Positive problem-solving experiences may serve as a type of corrective experience which would prevent the formation of dysfunctional relationship beliefs and behaviors. Such interventions would improve the chances for children to form satisfying, positive relationships later in life, and model positive skills for future generations.

Methodological Limitations

One striking finding of the current study was the amount of overlap among the independent variables. Participants who reported witnessing violence between their parents were likely to have also witnessed a high level of nonviolent discord, as well as to have been victims of physical or sexual abuse themselves. In fact, of the witness group, only 9 men and only 7 women did not report being abused themselves. This finding is interesting in and of itself, in that it suggests that there is a high correlation among certain types of risk factors for children. However, it creates a problem methodologically for this study in that it is difficult to judge what unique influence each variable has on the dependent variables.

Another methodological limitation of this study had to do with the fact that so few aggressive and avoidant conflict resolution behaviors were reported by participants in general. Also, in general, the majority of participants reported a high level of optimism, and a low level of the belief that disagreement is destructive. This creates the problem of limited variability, and makes it difficult to determine the true relationship between the

predictor (nonviolent discord, abuse, witness status, gender) and criterion (aggressive conflict resolution behaviors) variables.

Participants in this study were in general young and single, which means that they have had a relatively small amount of time to form long-term intimate relationships. As such, they may not have had enough experience in relationships on which to base beliefs and reports about behaviors. This factor may have contributed to an overall bias to report optimistic relationship beliefs and positive conflict resolution behaviors, in that participants' limited relationship experience in general means that they have had less of an opportunity to experience negative relational interactions.

Future Research

In light of the great amount of overlap found between the independent variables in this study (parental violence, nonviolent parental discord, childhood abuse, and parental divorce), future studies investigating the effects of any one of these variables would need to use a larger group of participants in order to determine more definitively what the unique effects of each experience are. Research using behavioral observations of couples during the discussion of relationship conflicts would also be useful. Such research could look at individuals with different early family experiences to see whether the effects found in the present study, based on self-report data, would be replicated. In addition, this research would be helpful in establishing whether people's self reports of conflict behaviors are indicative of what they actually do during live discussions.

As noted above, the main hypothesis of the study, namely that witnessing parental

violence affects certain relationship beliefs and nonviolent conflict resolution behaviors in adulthood, was not supported. This suggests that certain variables counteract the effects of witnessing violence and other comorbid risk factors, such that many individuals learn functional relationship behaviors and form positive relationship beliefs despite prior negative experiences. Future research aimed at discovering such “protective” influences is needed in order to sort out the myriad of person and environment variables and how they interact in the formation of relationship beliefs and behaviors. In addition, research should address whether the experience of witnessing parental violence is related to relationship beliefs and behaviors not studied in the current investigation, such as beliefs about the value of commitment, expectations regarding the balance of power in a relationship, and the tendency to become involved in certain conflict patterns in relationships, such as a demand-withdraw interactional style.

In order to account for the fact that witnessing violence was not related to later relationship beliefs and nonviolent conflict resolution behaviors, and for the fact that parental divorce was associated with more positive relationship beliefs, a “saliency” hypothesis was elaborated. This hypothesis stated specifically that for individuals whose parents’ conflicts result in dramatic consequences (violence or divorce), relationship issues in general become more salient, and that such individuals are more motivated to learn positive relational skills in order to succeed where their parents failed. Future research would be needed in order to determine whether salience of relationship issues does in fact moderate the relationship between parental violence (or parental divorce) and later relationship beliefs and behaviors.

All studies to date on the long-term effects of witnessing parental violence have been retrospective in nature. Prospective longitudinal research needs to be carried out in order to be able to more clearly identify the nature of the psychological and relational effects of certain types of troubling early experiences. In addition, longitudinal investigations of the effects of intervention efforts should be done, in order to determine whether the damage done by early exposure to parental conflict or abuse can be reversed or reduced by treatment of trauma symptoms and conflict resolution skills training approaches.

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Appendix A

Revised Conflict Tactics Scale-Parental Physical Assault Items

(Murray A. Straus, Sherry L. Hamby, Sue Boney-McCoy, & David B. Sugarman, 1996)

INSTRUCTIONS: Following are listed some things that may have occurred between your parents or care givers during times of disagreement. Please indicate the frequency with which you witnessed (saw, heard, or saw evidence of) these actions during the time you were growing up. Use the following numbers to indicate the frequency with which these actions took place in your lifetime. "Father" may mean any primary male care giver in your life (your biological father, adoptive father, foster father, step-father, or any significant male partner of your mother). "Mother" may mean any primary female care giver in your life (your biological mother, adoptive mother, foster mother, step-mother, or any significant female partner of your father).

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 0 | Never |
| 1 | Once |
| 2 | Twice |
| 3 | 3-5 times |
| 4 | 6-10 times |
| 5 | 11-20 times |
| 6 | More than 20 times |

Saw or Heard
This Happen

Did Not See Or
Hear, But Saw
Evidence That
This Happened

Father threw something at mother
that could hurt.

Mother threw something at father
that could hurt.

Father twisted mother's arm or hair.

Mother twisted father's arm or hair.

Father pushed or shoved mother.

Mother pushed or shoved father.

_____	_____	Father grabbed mother.
_____	_____	Mother grabbed father.
_____	_____	Father slapped mother.
_____	_____	Mother slapped father.
_____	_____	Father kicked mother.
_____	_____	Mother kicked father.
_____	_____	Father punched or hit mother with something that could hurt.
_____	_____	Mother punched or hit father with something that could hurt.
_____	_____	Father choked mother.
_____	_____	Mother choked father.
_____	_____	Father slammed mother against a wall.
_____	_____	Mother slammed father against a wall.
_____	_____	Father burned or scalded mother.
_____	_____	Mother burned or scalded father.
_____	_____	Father beat up mother.
_____	_____	Mother beat up father.
_____	_____	Father used a knife or a gun against mother.
_____	_____	Mother used a knife or a gun against father.

_____ Saw evidence that father had used violence against mother, but was not sure what had happened. Specify what you think happened: _____

_____ Saw evidence that mother had used violence against father, but was not sure what had happened. Specify what you think happened: _____

Appendix B

Revised Conflict Tactics Scale-Parental Psychological Aggression Items
(Murray A. Straus, Sherry L. Hamby, Sue Boney-McCoy, & David B. Sugarman, 1996)

INSTRUCTIONS: Following are listed some things that may have occurred between your parents or care givers during times of disagreement. Please indicate the frequency with which you witnessed (saw or heard) these actions during the time you were growing up. Use the following numbers to indicate the frequency with which these actions took place in your lifetime. "Father" may mean any primary male care giver in your life (your biological father, adoptive father, foster father, step-father, or any significant male partner of your mother). "Mother" may mean any primary female care giver in your life (your biological mother, adoptive mother, foster mother, step-mother, or any significant female partner of your father).

0	Never	4	6-10 times
1	Once	5	11-20 times
2	Twice	6	More than 20 times
3	3-5 times		

_____ Father insulted or swore at mother.

_____ Mother insulted or swore at father.

_____ Father shouted or yelled at mother.

_____ Mother shouted or yelled at father.

_____ Father stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.

_____ Mother stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.

_____ Father said something to spite mother.

_____ Mother said something to spite father.

_____ Father called mother fat or ugly.

_____ Mother called father fat or ugly.

_____ Father destroyed something that belonged to mother.

_____ Mother destroyed something that belonged to father.

_____ Father accused mother of being a lousy lover.

_____ Mother accused father or being a lousy lover.

_____ Father threatened to hit or throw something at mother.

_____ Mother threatened to hit or throw something at father.

Appendix C

Revised Conflict Tactics Scale-Original Version

(Murray A. Straus, Sherry L. Hamby, Sue Boney-McCoy, & David B. Sugarman, 1996)

INSTRUCTIONS: No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have (or have had) differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things during a disagreement in any relationship that you have had after the age of 18 that lasted at least one month.

1=Once

5=11-20 times

2=Twice

6=More than 20 times

3=3-5 times

0=This has never happened

4=6-10 times

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I showed my partner I cared even though we disagreed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 2. My partner showed care for me even though we disagreed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 3. I explained my side of a disagreement to my partner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 4. My partner explained his/her side of a disagreement to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 5. I insulted or swore at my partner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 6. My partner did this to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 7. I threw something at my partner that could hurt. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 8. My partner did this to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 9. I twisted my partner's arm or hair. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 10. My partner did this to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 11. I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 12. My partner had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 13. I showed respect for my partner's feelings about an issue. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 14. My partner showed respect for my feelings about an issue. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 15. I made my partner have sex without a condom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 16. My partner did this to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| 17. I pushed or shoved my partner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 |

18. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
19. I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
20. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
21. I used a knife or gun on my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
22. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
23. I passed out from being hit on the head by my partner in a fight.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
24. My partner passed out from being hit on the head in a fight with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
25. I called my partner fat or ugly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
26. My partner called me fat or ugly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
27. I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
28. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
29. I destroyed something belonging to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
30. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
31. I went to a doctor because of a fight with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
32. My partner went to a doctor because of a fight with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
33. I choked my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
34. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
35. I shouted or yelled at my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
36. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
37. I slammed my partner against a wall.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
38. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
39. I said I was sure we could work out a problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
40. My partner was sure we could work it out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
41. I needed to see a doctor because of a fight with my partner, but I didn't.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
42. My partner needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me, but didn't.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
43. I beat up my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
44. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
45. I grabbed my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
46. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
47. I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0

48. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
49. I stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
50. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
51. I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to (but did not use physical force).	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
52. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
53. I slapped my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
54. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
55. I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
56. My partner had a broken bone from a fight with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
57. I used threats to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
58. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
59. I suggested a compromise to a disagreement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
60. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
61. I burned or scalded my partner on purpose.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
62. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
63. I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
64. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
65. I accused my partner of being a lousy lover.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
66. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
67. I did or said something to spite my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
68. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
69. I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
70. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
71. I felt physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
72. My partner still felt physical pain the next day because of a fight we had.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
73. I kicked my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
74. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
75. I used threats to make my partner have sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
76. My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
77. I agreed to try a solution my partner suggested.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
78. My partner agreed to try a solution I suggested.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0

Appendix D

The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale
(John H. Grych, Michael Seid, and Frank D. Fincham, 1992)

INSTRUCTIONS: In every family there are times when parents don't get along. When parents argue or disagree, children can feel a lot of different ways. We would like to know what kind of feelings you had when your parents had arguments or disagreed while you were growing up. "Parents" refers to the people who were most involved in raising you, and may include biological parents, step-parents, or any significant partner of your mother or father. Rate each statement as T for True, ST for Sort of True, or F for False.

- ___ 1. I never saw my parents arguing or disagreeing.
- ___ 2. When my parents had an argument, they usually worked it out.
- ___ 3. My parents often got into arguments about the things I did in school.
- ___ 4. My parents got really mad when they argued.
- ___ 5. When my parents argued, I could find something to do to make myself feel better.
- ___ 6. I used to get scared when my parents argued.
- ___ 7. I felt caught in the middle when my parents argued.
- ___ 8. I wasn't to blame when my parents argued.
- ___ 9. They may not have thought I knew it, but my parents argued or disagreed a lot.
- ___ 10. Even after my parents stopped arguing, they stayed mad at each other.
- ___ 11. My parents had arguments because they were not happy with each other.
- ___ 12. When my parents had a disagreement, they discussed it quietly.
- ___ 13. I didn't know what to do when my parents had arguments.
- ___ 14. My parents were often mean to each other, even when I was around.
- ___ 15. When my parents argued, I worried about what would happen to me.
- ___ 16. I didn't feel like I had to take sides when my parents had a disagreement.
- ___ 17. It was usually my fault when my parents argued.
- ___ 18. I often saw my parents arguing.
- ___ 19. When my parents disagreed about something, they usually came up with a solution.
- ___ 20. My parents' arguments were usually about something I did.
- ___ 21. The reasons my parents argued never changed.
- ___ 22. When my parents had arguments, they said mean things to each other.

- ___ 23. When my parents argued or disagreed, I could usually help make things better.
- ___ 24. When my parents argued, I was afraid that something bad would happen.
- ___ 25. My mom wanted me to be on her side when she and my dad argued.
- ___ 26. Even if they didn't say it, I knew I was to blame when my parents argued.
- ___ 27. My parents hardly ever argued.
- ___ 28. When my parents argued they usually made up right away.
- ___ 29. My parents usually argued or disagreed because of things I did.
- ___ 30. My parents argued because they didn't really love each other.
- ___ 31. When my parents had an argument, they yelled a lot.
- ___ 32. When my parents argued, there was nothing I could do to stop them.
- ___ 33. When my parents argued, I worried that one of them would get hurt.
- ___ 34. I felt like I had to take sides when my parents had a disagreement.
- ___ 35. My parents would often nag and complain about each other around the house.
- ___ 36. My parents hardly ever yelled when they had a disagreement.
- ___ 37. My parents often got into arguments when I did something wrong.
- ___ 38. My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument.
- ___ 39. After my parents stopped arguing, they were friendly toward each other.
- ___ 40. When my parents argued, I was afraid they would yell at me, too.
- ___ 41. My parents blamed me when they had arguments.
- ___ 42. My dad wanted me to be on his side when he and my mom argued.
- ___ 43. My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument.
- ___ 44. When my parents argued or disagreed, there was nothing I could do to make myself feel better.
- ___ 45. When my parents argued, I worried that they might get divorced.
- ___ 46. My parents still acted mean to each other after they had an argument.
- ___ 47. My parents had arguments because they didn't know how to get along.
- ___ 48. Usually, it wasn't my fault when my parents had an argument.
- ___ 49. When my parents argued, they didn't listen to anything I said.

Appendix E
Traumatic Events Survey Items
(Diana M. Elliott, 1992)

INSTRUCTIONS: The following survey asks about things that may have happened to you in the past. Please answer all of the questions that you can, as honestly as possible. Throughout the survey, you will be asked how upsetting various events in your life have been for you. Respond on a scale of 0 to 3, where 0 = Not at all upsetting, and 3 = Very upsetting.

1. Before you were 18, did either of your parents (including step-parents or significant others of one or both parents) hit you with a hand or fist, kick you, throw you, throw something at you on purpose, or otherwise give you a beating which caused you to have marks, bruises, blood, or broken bones?

_____ No

_____ Yes

_____ Your age the first time it happened.

_____ Your age the last time it happened.

How many times did it happen?

_____ 1 _____ 2-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-20 _____ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

2. Before you were 18, were you ever exposed to someone "flashing" or exposing their sexual parts to you?

_____ No

_____ Yes

If yes,

____ Your age the first time it happened.

____ Your age the last time it happened.

____ With how many different people did this happen?

What was their relationship to you? (Check all that apply.)

____ Father/Mother

____ Brother/Sister

____ Stepfather/Stepmother

____ Stepbrother/Stepsister

____ Other family member

____ Parent's friend

____ Friend or peer

____ Stranger

____ Professional:

____ Coach

____ Doctor

____ Minister/Priest/Rabbi

____ Teacher

____ Therapist/Counselor

____ Other (_____)

How many times did it happen?

____ 1

____ 2-5

____ 6-10

____ 11-20

____ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

3. Before you were 18, did anyone ever spy on you or watch you while you were bathing, dressing, or using the bathroom?

____ No

____ Yes

If yes,

____ Your age the first time it happened.

____ Your age the last time it happened.

____ With how many different people did this happen?

What was their relationship to you? (Check all that apply.)

____ Father/Mother

____ Brother/Sister

____ Stepfather/Stepmother

____ Stepbrother/Stepsister

____ Other family member

____ Parent's friend

____ Friend or peer

____ Stranger

____ Professional:

____ Coach

____ Doctor

____ Minister/Priest/Rabbi

____ Teacher

____ Therapist/Counselor

____ Other (_____)

How many times did it happen?

____ 1

____ 2-5

____ 6-10

____ 11-20

____ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened?

0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now?

0 1 2 3

4. Before you were 18, were you ever forced or coerced to watch sexual acts, including masturbation and/or sex between people?

____ No

____ Yes

If yes,

____ Your age the first time it happened.

____ Your age the last time it happened.

____ With how many different people did this happen?

What was their relationship to you? (Check all that apply.)

____ Father/Mother

____ Brother/Sister

____ Stepfather/Stepmother

____ Stepbrother/Stepsister

____ Other family member

____ Parent's friend

____ Friend or peer

____ Stranger

____ Professional:

____ Coach

____ Doctor

____ Minister/Priest/Rabbi

____ Teacher

____ Therapist/Counselor

____ Other (_____)

How many times did it happen?

____ 1 ____ 2-5 ____ 6-10 ____ 11-20 ____ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

5. Before you were 18, were you ever made to pose for sexy or suggestive photographs?

____ No

____ Yes

If yes,

____ Your age the first time it happened.

____ Your age the last time it happened.

____ With how many different people did this happen?

What was their relationship to you? (Check all that apply.)

____ Father/Mother

____ Brother/Sister

____ Stepfather/Stepmother

____ Stepbrother/Stepsister

____ Other family member

____ Parent's friend

____ Friend or peer

____ Stranger

____ Professional:

____ Coach

____ Doctor

____ Minister/Priest/Rabbi

____ Teacher

____ Therapist/Counselor

____ Other (_____)

How many times did it happen?

____ 1

____ 2-5

____ 6-10

____ 11-20

____ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

6. Before you were 18, were you ever forced or coerced to perform sexual acts for money?

____ No

____ Yes

If yes,

___ Your age the first time it happened.

___ Your age the last time it happened.

___ With how many different people did this happen?

What was their relationship to you? (Check all that apply.)

___ Father/Mother

___ Brother/Sister

___ Stepfather/Stepmother

___ Stepbrother/Stepsister

___ Other family member

___ Parent's friend

___ Friend or peer

___ Stranger

___ Professional:

___ Coach

___ Doctor

___ Minister/Priest/Rabbi

___ Teacher

___ Therapist/Counselor

___ Other (_____)

How many times did it happen?

___ 1

___ 2-5

___ 6-10

___ 11-20

___ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

7. Before you were 18, did anyone five or more years older than you ever touch your genitals, buttocks, or breasts in a sexual way or have you touch them in a sexual way?

___ No

___ Yes

If yes,

____ Your age the first time it happened.

____ Your age the last time it happened.

How many times did it happen?

____ 1 ____ 2-5 ____ 6-10 ____ 11-20 ____ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

Did any of these incidents include oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse, or the insertion of a finger or an object into your anus or vagina? ____ No ____ Yes

Did it happen with a female? ____ No ____ Yes

Did it happen with a male? ____ No ____ Yes

Was physical force used? ____ No ____ Yes

Were threats used? ____ No ____ Yes

____ With how many different people five or more years older than you did this happen?

What was their relationship to you? (Check all that apply.)

____ Father/Mother

____ Brother/Sister

____ Stepfather/Stepmother

____ Stepbrother/Stepsister

____ Other family member

____ Parent's friend

____ Friend or peer

____ Stranger

____ Professional:

____ Coach

____ Doctor

____ Minister/Priest/Rabbi

____ Teacher

____ Therapist/Counselor

____ Other (_____)

8. Before you were 18, did anyone less than five years older than you use force or threats to touch your genitals, buttocks, or breasts in a sexual way, or have you touch them sexually?

___ No

___ Yes

If yes,

___ Your age the first time it happened.

___ Your age the last time it happened.

How many times did it happen?

___ 1 ___ 2-5 ___ 6-10 ___ 11-20 ___ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

Did any of these incidents include oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse, or the insertion of a finger or an object into your anus or vagina? ___ No ___ Yes

Did it happen with a female? ___ No ___ Yes

Did it happen with a male? ___ No ___ Yes

Was physical force used? ___ No ___ Yes

Were threats used? ___ No ___ Yes

___ With how many different people less than five years older than you did this happen?

What was their relationship to you? (Check all that apply.)

___ Brother/Sister

___ Stepbrother/Stepsister

___ Other family member

___ Friend or peer

___ Stranger

___ Other (_____)

9. Before you were 18, were there ever times when you were tortured, repeatedly hurt, or forced to do something sexual during some sort of meeting, ritual, cult gathering, or religious activity?

_____ No

_____ Yes

_____ Your age the first time it happened.

_____ Your age the last time it happened.

How many times did it happen?

_____ 1 _____ 2-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-20 _____ More than 20

How upsetting was it when it happened? 0 1 2 3

How upsetting is the memory of it now? 0 1 2 3

Appendix F

The Relationship Belief Inventory
(Roy J. Eidelson and Norman Epstein, 1981)

INSTRUCTIONS: The statements below describe ways in which a person might feel about a relationship with another person. Please mark the space next to each statement according to how strongly you believe that the statement is true or false for you. If you are not currently in a relationship, please respond according to how you felt in your most recent relationship of one month or more. Please mark every item. Write in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, or 0 to stand for the following answers.

- 5: I strongly believe that the statement is true.
- 4: I believe that the statement is true.
- 3: I believe that the statement is probably true, or more true than false.
- 2: I believe that the statement is probably false, or more false than true.
- 1: I believe that the statement is false.
- 0: I strongly believe that the statement is false.

- ___ 1. If your partner expresses disagreement with your ideas, s/he probably does not think highly of you.
- ___ 2. I do not expect my partner to sense all of my moods.
- ___ 3. Damages done early in a relationship probably cannot be reversed.
- ___ 4. I get upset if I think I have not completely satisfied my partner sexually.
- ___ 5. Men and women have the same basic emotional needs.
- ___ 6. I cannot accept it when my partner disagrees with me.
- ___ 7. If I have to tell my partner that something is important to me, it does not mean that s/he is insensitive to me.
- ___ 8. My partner does not seem capable of behaving other than s/he does now.
- ___ 9. If I'm not in the mood for sex when my partner is, I don't get upset about it.
- ___ 10. Misunderstandings between partners generally are due to inborn differences in psychological make-ups of men and women.
- ___ 11. I take it as a personal insult when my partner disagrees with an important idea of mine.
- ___ 12. I get very upset if my partner does not recognize how I am feeling and I have to tell him/her.
- ___ 13. A partner can learn to become more responsive to his/her partner's needs.

- ___ 14. A good sexual partner can get himself/herself aroused for sex whenever necessary.
- ___ 15. Men and women will probably never understand the opposite sex very well.
- ___ 16. I like it when my partner presents views different from mine.
- ___ 17. People who have a close relationship can sense each other's needs as if they could read each other's minds.
- ___ 18. Just because my partner has acted in ways that upset me does not mean that s/he will do so in the future.
- ___ 19. If I cannot perform well sexually whenever my partner is in the mood, I would consider that I have a problem.
- ___ 20. Men and women need the same basic things out of a relationship.
- ___ 21. I get very upset when my partner and I cannot see things the same way.
- ___ 22. It is important to me for my partner to anticipate my needs by sensing changes in my moods.
- ___ 23. A partner who hurts you badly once probably will hurt you again.
- ___ 24. I can feel OK about my lovemaking even if my partner does not achieve orgasm.
- ___ 25. Biological differences between men and women are not major causes of couples' problems.
- ___ 26. I cannot tolerate it when my partner argues with me.
- ___ 27. A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell.
- ___ 28. If my partner wants to change, I believe that s/he can do it.
- ___ 29. If my sexual partner does not get satisfied completely, it does not mean I have failed.
- ___ 30. One of the major causes of marital problems is that men and women have different emotional needs.
- ___ 31. When my partner and I disagree, I feel like our relationship is falling apart.
- ___ 32. People who love each other know exactly what each other's thoughts are without a word ever being said.
- ___ 33. If you don't like the way a relationship is going, you can make it better.
- ___ 34. Some difficulties in my sexual performance do not mean personal failure to me.
- ___ 35. You can't really understand someone of the opposite sex.
- ___ 36. I do not doubt my partner's feelings for me when we argue.
- ___ 37. If you have to ask your partner for something, it shows that s/he was not "tuned into" your needs.

- ___ 38. I do not expect my partner to be able to change.
- ___ 39. When I do not seem to be performing well sexually, I get upset.
- ___ 40. Men and women will always be mysteries to each other.

Appendix G

The Conflict Inventory

(Gayla Margolin, Vivian Fernandez, Linda Gorin, and Samuel Ortiz, 1982)

INSTRUCTIONS: When you and your partner have a difference of opinion or conflicting viewpoint, how often do you exhibit the following behaviors? Indicate your response to each question by placing an "X" beside one of the six possible responses. If you are not currently in a relationship, please respond according to how you acted in your most recent relationship of one month or more.

1. Initiate a discussion to air your different points of view.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

2. Try to hide the tension you feel and act as though nothing has happened.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

3. Listen attentively to what your partner is saying.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

4. Insult your partner or call him/her names.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

5. Sulk or pout.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

6. Keep distant from your partner until you both cool down.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

7. Threaten the physical well-being of your partner.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

8. Get involved in physical activity or work to cool down your emotions.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

9. Feel regret for something you said or did.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

10. State your position clearly.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

11. Leave the room or walk away from your partner in the middle of a discussion.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

12. Blame your partner.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

13. Cry.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

14. Repeat yourself to make sure your point was understood.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

15. Feel closer to your partner at the end of the discussion than when it began.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

16. Talk more critically after having had drugs or alcohol.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

17. Admit your own faults or your responsibility for the problem.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

18. Come up with helpful ideas or solutions.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

19. Think about leaving the relationship altogether.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

20. Stop the discussion early by changing the topic, using humor, or simply stating, "I don't want to talk about this."

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

21. Give in to your partner to avoid an argument.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

22. Suggest having sex to make up after an argument.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

23. Take out your anger on someone other than your partner.

<input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%)	

24. Give in but plan to get revenge later.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%) | <input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%) | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%) | <input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%) | |

25. Hit, push, or slap your partner.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%) | <input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%) | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%) | <input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%) | |

26. Withhold sex.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never (0%) | <input type="checkbox"/> More often than not (50-70%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely (10%) | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently (70-90%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally (10-30%) | <input type="checkbox"/> Almost always (90%) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less often than not (30-50%) | |

Appendix H

Index of Optimism about Relationships

INSTRUCTIONS: The following are statements which reflect thoughts that people sometimes have regarding intimate relationships. Please rate, using the following scale, the degree to which you agree with each statement.

- 1 Strongly agree
- 2 Agree somewhat
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Disagree somewhat
- 5 Strongly disagree

___ I am already involved in or feel that my chances are very good for being involved in a successful, fulfilling intimate relationship.

___ I am now experiencing or am optimistic about finding a caring, satisfying relationship.

___ I now have or am confident about finding a loving, understanding significant other.

___ I feel confident in my abilities to make my views understood in a relationship disagreement.

___ Generally, I feel certain in my abilities to find workable solutions to relationship problems when they arise.

___ When faced with a conflict in an intimate relationship, I usually feel optimistic that I will be able to work things out constructively.

Appendix I

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this project. This study was designed to assess how past experiences affect different aspects of peoples' close relationships. Specifically, we were interested in finding out how viewing violence between parents in childhood may be related to people's beliefs and views about couples relationships, as well as to behaviors that partners exhibit when interacting with one another. Also, we were interested in discovering whether men and women are affected differently by witnessing parental aggression. The results of this study may help inform researchers and clinicians about the long-term impact of witnessing violence between parents on adult relationships, and about how to best structure interventions with such individuals. Because the data for this study is still being collected, it would be appreciated if you did not share the details of the project with friends or classmates who may also be participating in the study. Thank you again for your participation. This project would not have been possible without your involvement.